THE Nation.

BAILOUTS, OLD AND NEW
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OCTOBER 27, 2008
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Letters

Coming of Age in Papua New Guinea

Arlington, Va.

Mark Dowie's "The Wrong Path to Conservation" [Sept. 29], a distorted account of an ambitious project that encountered difficulties but also accomplished important results, failed to help your readers understand both the challenges and promise of modern conservation work.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a global conservation priority that faces multiple threats to the ecosystems and natural resources vital to its people and their livelihoods. Conservation International (CI) has worked in PNG since 1991 and has invested more than $16 million in the cause of conservation there.

In 2001 our work with PNG conservationists led us to seek an expansion of our efforts in Milne Bay, an archipelago stretching across hundreds of miles in one of the most remote places on earth. We entered into an agreement with the UN Development Program (UNDP), the Global Environment Facility and the Milne Bay provincial government to develop a network of protected marine areas to be managed by local communities. It was the biggest project of its kind at the time.

The goal was to empower Milne Bay communities to manage their fish stocks and coral reefs, which were under threat. All involved, from international organizations to local communities, embraced the project as sound and desirable. It had nothing to do with a "cargo" mentality of trading money for conservation, as Dowie asserted. Effective and sustainable conservation means linking people's livelihood and quality of life with saving the biodiversity essential for human survival.

After we suspended the project in 2006, a UN report graded our achievement of objectives and outcomes "satisfactory." Valuable biodiversity data had been gathered, local communities engaged and draft conservation agreements negotiated.

But the report also cited problems in management that caused the project to run out of money a year early. CI accepts responsibility for its role in the lack of sufficient oversight, and we have made necessary changes in oversight in our work worldwide. Contrary to Dowie, CI accounted for all the money in the project, UNDP approved the financial reports and a final audit by international accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers found nothing wrong. Also contrary to Dowie, CI never left Milne Bay and continues there with three full-time and five part-time staff. All are Papua New Guineans.

The purpose of my 2002 trip to Milne Bay was to match committed and passionate donors with projects. People willing to contribute time and resources to environmental causes are essential to our work and to many other organizations striving to improve global sustainability. Of course, these donors want a firsthand look at what they are supporting. Such exposure should be encouraged, not mocked.

Two of the participants on that trip, Fisk Johnson and Stone Gossard, are leaders in their commitment to environmental causes. Pearl Jam helped pioneer carbon offsets in the music industry, and SC Johnson has more than a century of real and demonstrable environmental actions. No one from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation was on the trip.

CI will continue to work with all partners interested in effective global conservation, including governments, businesses and indigenous and local communities. Conservation must engage people and communities everywhere to fight climate change, species extinction and other unprecedented threats.

Peter Seligmann, *Chairman and CEO*
Conservation International

letters@thenation.com

Dowie Replies

Point Reyes Station, Calif.

Peter Seligmann responds as if I were accusing him and Conservation International of wrongdoing and faulty judgment, when I was merely reporting others alleging wrongdoing and faulty judgment on the part of CI in Papua New Guinea. When I heard the accusations I considered them serious and reliable because they were being made by serious, reliable people working for large, credible institutions like the United Nations, the Global Environment Facility and the government of PNG. These were not enemies or adversaries of CI. Enemies there were, to be sure; they had much

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$700 Billion Question

At first blush, the phrase "the real economy" seems jarringly redundant. As opposed to what? The surreal economy? The fictional economy? But after several weeks of obsessive coverage of the rolling crisis in domestic and now international credit markets, the phrase is useful to distinguish from the financial economy, that sector of American capitalism that has received nearly all of the media's attention since the staggering events of mid-September. And the real economy is cratering.

EDITORIAL

There are two problems at hand. The first is a recession in which much of the country is already mired (a recent *New York Times* graphic showed that 14 major cities are in recession). The last recession, in 2001, was mild. This one won't be—a point on which there is near unanimous agreement. The second problem is that the expansion that preceded this recession was not very bountiful, to put it mildly, for the vast majority of working people. According to nearly every metric—median wage, household income, household debt—the nonrich are worse off now than they've been at the end of any previous expansion in the postwar period.

Which brings us to the $700 billion. Already, establishment consensus is hardening around a deceptively simple assumption: that the passage of the Paulson bailout plan means that the next administration will have to cut back on its spending. In the two presidential debates and the vice presidential one, the moderators asked variations on the same question: in these lean times, how will you tighten the government's belt? While Barack Obama has responded by emphasizing the need to "prioritize," John McCain has gleefully promised cuts, cuts and more cuts.

The premise of this entire discussion is, quite simply, nuts. First, as a technical point, the only way the bailout will actually cost taxpayers $700 billion is if every asset purchased by government falls in value to zero. If that happens, we'll have bigger things to worry about than the government debt. More important, the idea that government should cut back spending during a recession is dangerous folly. Consumer spending currently makes up 70 percent of GDP, and it's about to nosedive. State and local tax revenue will fall, which will force deep service and spending cuts. The only way to relieve economic suffering, create jobs and restore stable growth is for the federal government to step in and bolster demand by spending money. Lots of it. There's no shortage of places to invest: extended unemployment payments, universal health insurance, large-scale social programs and infrastructure. And there are new revenue streams to be found: a peace dividend from ending the Iraq war, repealing the Bush tax cuts for the rich and putting a price on carbon.

But there's no way around it: there will be higher deficits and more debt. That will have some tough consequences down the road, and it will certainly make the bond market shed a few tears. The alternative, though, is far worse: Widespread immiseration. Unemployment higher than we've seen in a generation. Massive bankruptcy and epidemic foreclosures. Skyrocketing poverty.

Like an army burning the fields as it beats a retreat, the Bush administration is leaving the next administration with a huge Treasury program conservatives can use as an excuse to sabotage the entire domestic agenda of a Democratic president. Progressives have to push back against this argument, starting now. They can begin by pointing out one cruel irony of the conservatives' logic: after supporting the use of taxpayers' money to save the bond market, isn't it a little perverse to use the bond market as an excuse not to save millions of Americans from destitution?

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ON THE COVER: SENATE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JEANNE SHAHEEN (NH), AL FRANKEN (MN), JEFF MERKLEY (OR), KAY HAGAN (NC), MARK WARNER (VA), TOM UDALL (NM) AND MARK UDALL (CO). COVER DESIGN BY GENE CASE & STEPHEN KLING/AVENGING ANGELS; ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER O. ZIERLEIN

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A Big Government Bailout

It is sad to see both major parties agree to spend $700 billion of taxpayer money to bail out huge financial institutions that are notable for two characteristics: incompetence and greed. There is a much better solution to the financial crisis. But it would require discarding what has been conventional wisdom for too long: that government intervention in the economy ("big government") must be avoided like the plague, because the "free market" can be depended on to guide the economy toward growth and justice. Surely the sight of Wall Street begging for government aid is almost comic in light of its long devotion to a "free market" unregulated by government.

COMMENT

Let's face a historical truth: we have never had a free market. We have always had government intervention in the economy, and indeed that intervention has been welcomed by the captains of finance and industry. These titans of wealth hypocritically warned against "big government" but only when government threatened to regulate their activities or when it contemplated passing some of the nation's wealth on to the neediest people. They had no quarrel with big government when it served their needs.

It started way back when the founding fathers met in Philadelphia in 1787 to draft the Constitution. The year before, they had seen armed rebellions of farmers in western Massachusetts (Shays's Rebellion), where farms were being seized for nonpayment of taxes. Thousands of farmers surrounded the courthouses and refused to allow their farms to be auctioned off. The founders' correspondence at this time makes clear their worries about such uprisings getting out of hand. Gen. Henry Knox wrote to George Washington, warning that the ordinary soldier who fought in the Revolution thought that by contributing to the defeat of England he deserved an equal share of the wealth of the country, that "the property of the United States…ought to be the common property of all."

In framing the Constitution, the founders created "big government" powerful enough to put down the rebellions of farmers, to return escaped slaves to their masters and to put down Indian resistance when settlers moved westward. The first big bailout was the decision of the new government to redeem for full value the almost worthless bonds held by speculators.

From the start, in the first sessions of the first Congress, the government interfered with the free market by establishing tariffs to subsidize manufacturers and by becoming a partner with private banks in establishing a national bank. This role of big government supporting the interests of the business classes has continued all through the nation's history. Thus, in the nineteenth century the government subsidized canals and the merchant marine. In the decades before and during the Civil War, the government gave away some 100 million acres of land to the railroads, along with considerable loans to keep the railroad interests in business. The 10,000 Chinese and 3,000 Irish who worked on the transcontinental railroad got no free land and no loans, only long hours, little pay, accidents and sickness.

The principle of government helping big business and refusing government largesse to the poor was bipartisan, upheld by

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Republicans and Democrats. President Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, vetoed a bill to give $10,000 to Texas farmers to help them buy seed grain during a drought, saying, "Federal aid in such cases encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character." But that same year, he used the gold surplus to pay wealthy bondholders $28 above the value of each bond—a gift of $5 million.

Cleveland was enunciating the principle of rugged individualism—that we must make our fortunes on our own, without help from the government. In his 1931 *Harper's* essay "The Myth of Rugged American Individualism," historian Charles Beard carefully cataloged fifteen instances of the government intervening in the economy for the benefit of big business. Beard wrote, "For forty years or more there has not been a President, Republican or Democrat, who has not talked against government interference and then supported measures adding more interference to the huge collection already accumulated."

After World War II the aircraft industry had to be saved by infusions of government money. Then came the oil depletion allowances for the oil companies and the huge bailout for the Chrysler Corporation. In the 1980s the government bailed out the savings and loan industry with hundreds of billions of dollars, and the Cato Institute reports that in 2006 needy corporations like Boeing, Xerox, Motorola, Dow Chemical and General Electric received $92 billion in corporate welfare.

A simple and powerful alternative would be to take that huge sum of money, $700 billion, and give it directly to the people who need it. Let the government declare a moratorium on foreclosures and help homeowners pay off their mortgages. Create a federal jobs program to guarantee work to people who want and need jobs.

We have a historic and successful precedent. The government in the early days of the New Deal put millions of people to work rebuilding the nation's infrastructure. Hundreds of thousands of young people, instead of joining the army to escape poverty, joined the Civil Conservation Corps, which built bridges and highways, cleaned up harbors and rivers. Thousands of artists, musicians and writers were employed by the WPA's arts programs to paint murals, produce plays, write symphonies. The New Deal (defying the cries of "socialism") established Social Security, which, along with the GI Bill, became a model for what government could do to help its people.

That can be carried further, with "health security"—free healthcare for all, administered by the government, paid for from our Treasury, bypassing the insurance companies and the other privateers of the health industry. All that will take more than $700 billion. But the money is there: in the $600 billion for the military budget, once we decide we will not be a warmaking nation anymore, and in the bloated bank accounts of the superrich, once we bring them down to ordinary-rich size by taxing vigorously their income and their wealth.

When the cry goes up, whether from Republicans or Democrats, that this must not be done because it is "big government," the citizens should just laugh. And then agitate and organize on behalf of what the Declaration of Independence promised: that it is the responsibility of government to ensure the equal right of all to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

This is a golden opportunity for Obama to distance himself cleanly from McCain as well as the fossilized Democratic Party leaders, giving life to his slogan of change and thereby sweeping into office. And if he doesn't act, it will be up to the people, as it always has been, to raise a shout that will be heard around the world—and compel the politicians to listen.

HOWARD ZINN

Howard Zinn is the author of A People's History of the United States *and* A Power Governments Cannot Suppress.

Noted.

TSORIS FOR AIPAC? Last June **Chelsea Mozen** of **Just Foreign Policy** went to Capitol Hill to lobby for diplomacy with Iran and got bad news. "Every single office we went to, it was, 'AIPAC's just been here,'" she says, referring to the America Israel Public Affairs Committee, which was pushing HR 362, a resolution calling for "stringent inspection requirements on all persons, vehicles, ships, planes, trains, and cargo entering or departing Iran." When Mozen asked one staffer if there was anything anyone could do to block the measure, the answer was an emphatic no.

But over the summer, a grassroots uprising formed against AIPAC's resolution, and in late September the House leadership shelved the measure. "It was essentially a declaration of war through the back door," says **Trita Parsi**, president of the **National Iranian American Council**. "The only way to implement it was a naval blockade, and a naval blockade without UN Security Council authorization is an act of war."

Activist **M.J. Rosenberg** launched the battle with a post on Talking Points Memo warning that the legislation "would put us in a state of war with Iran. Right now." **Barney Frank** apologized for putting his name on the bill without reading it carefully. **Steve Cohen** of Tennessee removed his name—saying we don't have to play "tit for tat" with Ahmadinejad. And **Robert Wexler**, the hawkish Florida Congressman who was a sponsor of the bill, blasted it on The Huffington Post, saying it could open the door to another disastrous war. Then **J Street**, the alternative Israel lobby, collected 20,000 signatures against it. "This is the first time you've seen concerted pushback [on Iran] that involved the progressive Jewish community in an active way," says J Street's **Jeremy Ben-Ami**.

The resolution's 280 sponsors are sure to reintroduce it next year. That hasn't stopped Rosenberg and Parsi from declaring that Goliath fell. "One should be careful not to draw exaggerated conclusions, that AIPAC is running everything or is all-powerful," Parsi says, before adding, "I'm surprised that this was doable in an election year." PHILIP WEISS

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Media MIA

COMMENT

Anyone who followed the mainstream media coverage of the financial turmoil could be forgiven for being baffled by recent developments. When the House failed to pass the $700 billion bailout bill on its first try, the subsequent drop in the Dow was chalked up to the stalled legislation. But then the market bounced back, only to tank further after the bill was passed and signed. We were told that authorizing the $700 billion was absolutely necessary to unfreeze the short-term credit markets, which allow the economy to function. But Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson has no plans to spend any bailout cash until after the elections.

Despite these obvious holes in the bailout story, reporters have almost unanimously accepted its premise. On TV it's all crisis all the time, with images of the Great Depression and empty ATMs terrifying the many millions who don't know much about finance or even the fine print in their mortgages. Steve Pearlstein, business columnist for the *Washington Post*, exemplified the journalism that offered uncritical regurgitation of official-speak. In a blog entry titled "They Just Don't Get It," he characterized anyone who opposed the bailout as ignorant. Just why the bailout was the only solution he never explained.

Worst of all, two of our best-known journalists got so wrapped up in hype that they chose falsehood over fact. When the stock market sank on September 29, Katie Couric opened her CBS newscast saying it was "the biggest decline in stock prices ever," and Brian Williams of NBC said it was "the worst single-day drop ever." Nonsense. It was bad and it was big news, but it was only the third-worst in the past twenty-one years.

But now that events have cast new light on the bailout supporters' dubious claims, perhaps reporters can tug on a few threads that merit attention. To begin with: just how much have Paulson's policies benefited his former firm Goldman Sachs? Thanks to the *New York Times*'s Gretchen Morgenson, we now know that when the Fed decided to bail out insurer AIG, there was one nongovernment official in the room—the current head of Goldman. Paulson's old firm is on the hook for as much as $20 billion from AIG, half of the investment bank's shareholder equity. And Paulson's decision to let Lehman Brothers die meant one less competitor for Goldman, a fact few journalists noted. (Before the bailout, Goldman shares were in free fall. After? The shares soared back almost to where they had been.)

Even if you believe Paulson is acting with pure heart solely in the public interest, his actions scream scandal. Remember, under his original three-page plan, his power to spend $700 billion would have been unreviewable. Congress improved on that, but it still failed to require disclosure of those who would benefit from each asset purchased by the taxpayers. A party that had guaranteed payment of a package of mortgages, for example, could conceivably be relieved of its obligation by whoever is managing the Treasury's massive pool of money—and the man with that charge will likely be former Goldmanite Neel Kashkari. By such subtleties can Treasury enrich Goldman's owners without directly handing them a dime.

The battle of the first bailout may be over, but there's plenty of time for the media to get this story right: by aggressively asking, "Who benefits?," tracking how taxpayers' money is being spent and asking about alternatives that may cost less and be more effective. Reporters could also write about a new study of forty-two banking crises that shows bailouts can make things worse. They might explore how the bailout will redistribute income—upward to the richest among us. DAVID CAY JOHNSTON

David Cay Johnston, whose coverage of tax issues during the Clinton administration earned a Pulitzer Prize, is the author of Free Lunch: How the Wealthiest Americans Enrich Themselves at Government Expense (and Stick You With the Bill).

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Someone Watching Sarah Palin's Campaign Tactics Imagines How She Might Challenge a Referee's Call In a Sixth-Grade Hockey Game

Hockey Mom:
But ref, there's no way that's a goal that he made.
Remember that spitball that in second grade
Caromed off the teacher's nose? This little bird
Was close with the thrower, or that's what I heard.

Referee:
The puck's in the net, and when that's where it lands,
The only call possible's "Johnny's goal stands."

Hockey Mom:
They rode the same school bus, he and that thug.
So don't get misled by this kid's pretty mug.
The puck's in the net—at least somewhere near it?
It still wouldn't count. He's got no school spirit.

Referee:
The puck's in the net, and when that's where it lands,
The only call possible's "Johnny's goal stands."

Hockey Mom:
That Johnny's not from here. He transferred.
Remember?
His mother is foreign, and she's not a member
Of one of our churches. So what's to discuss?
I've just said he's foreign. He isn't like us.

Referee:
Go sit down, lady.

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Obama's iSuccess

Reno

Before Barack Obama spoke to a September rally at the University of Nevada, 21-year-old Carmen Gilbert took the stage to address her classmates, who spilled across the quad in a capacity crowd of 12,000 people. She was all business. "Take out your cellphones," said Gilbert, as she ordered the throng of rookie voters to text Obama's headquarters on the spot. With the punch of two buttons—a message reading NV—vital organizing intelligence poured into the campaign.

Obama's aides treasure data and contact information for voters in swing states, and text messages provide both. First, the campaign learns when and where a person joined up. So a student with a New York cellphone, who would otherwise be relegated to fundraising appeals, is reclassified for Nevada mobilization. Then, organizers directly reach them with text messages and calls. The campaign also asks supporters to forward text messages and grow the network.

"Every night there's a data sync on who is new and who is a longtime MyBO [Obama social network] user who started making calls," says Joe Rospars, Obama's new-media director, explaining how the campaign integrates virtual actions with organizing on the ground. A swing-state supporter who signs up online will swiftly receive calls from local staff and targeted e-mails. "Fifty percent of our e-mail is on state-specific items, like volunteer recruitment," Rospars told me one Sunday night in September, at a Chicago bar a few blocks from Obama headquarters. Each time a supporter interacts with the campaign, Rospars says, data specialists "create new layers" for targeting that person by region, engagement and volunteer preferences.

Campaign messages range from reminders about watching presidential debates to registration deadlines. The communication, however, is not confined to top-down missives from Chicago. On September 28 the campaign launched a turnout application on the popular iPhone. In a break with typical voter contact models, it empowers users to call their personalized list of voters. It sorts friends' phone numbers by "key battleground states" to focus on the people with potentially decisive votes.

Tapping personal networks can also unearth people who are not on the grid for conventional outreach. Scott Goodstein, the guru behind ObamaMobile, the campaign's cell outreach, anticipates the program "will generate thousands of additional personal contacts." Within a week of its launch, the tool broke into the Top Ten free downloads on iTunes. It bested iGolf, another new release, but is still trailing Lightsaber Unleashed as we go to press.

Reaching new people is futile, of course, if they aren't registered to vote. The Obama campaign has united web and field recruitment to wage one of the largest voter registration drives of a modern campaign. It's the first time since Jesse Jackson's 1980s bids that a candidate has staked success on mobilizing new voters. Obama's October schedule is studded with evidence of this audacious strategy; he's spending precious time in recently bright-red states like North Carolina, where he spoke to a 28,000-person rally on October 5. But he can't win the state within its 2004 universe of registered voters: they re-elected Bush by a whopping 12.5-point margin, about 436,000 votes. Obama needs new registrants just to narrow that gap—and he must still win back conservative swing voters.

Step one is working. Democratic registration has spiked by seven points in North Carolina since March—the GOP's is up only a point—and the Obama campaign says it has registered 160,000 new voters. It has forty-five field offices sending volunteers to find new voters; a parallel hunt continues online.

Obama's Internet success is well known, of course, since he has bested his rivals in both parties on everything from political traffic to YouTube views to MySpace friends. The campaign's use of the web for recruiting new voters, however, is largely below the radar. That's fine with Obama's aides, who think the quiet, steady growth of the list of new registrants will catch some Republicans off guard. One example is McCain's abrupt choice to cede Michigan, which he announced on the very day that new voters packed an 18,000-person Obama rally at Michigan State. Obama's press shop has done very little to promote its signature registration effort online—the innovative portal VoteForChange. (The campaign required my interviews with its Internet staff to be mostly on background.) VoteForChange has received scant print coverage, but it's a viral hit. Although the site is an Obama operation, it decouples registration from the Hopemonger. The spare bilingual homepage looks more like a search engine, soliciting information and helping visitors register, request absentee ballots or find polling locations.

The campaign can keep the effort discreet because it has a network to route around the press. Organizers spread the word using supporter e-mails, targeted Facebook ads—and an irreverent spoof video. The edgy clip spliced footage of Tom Brokaw imagining a McCain victory and directed terrified viewers to VoteForChange. It was an instant sensation, rocketing past celebrities as the most viewed item on YouTube. Within days NBC filed a copyright claim and the clip was pulled, but the new site had already bested the average traffic for Senate.gov. Meanwhile, in some states spikes in registration reveal a civic excitement broader than any single campaign can create. In Ohio a record-breaking 94 percent of eligible citizens have now registered.

It's easy to forget, but during the primary season Obama trailed in most polls before the Iowa caucuses. Credit the man for using personal appeal and the politics of hope to stay afloat, but credit his campaign's sophisticated Internet program for making even that possible. Without the web, they wouldn't have had the money to compete or the network to organize support beyond the party apparatus. Those feats, however, have blue borders. Obama has only altered Democratic politics so far.

If his strategy succeeds, all presidential politics could change. First-time voters—both this generation of the young, black or marginalized as well as future rookie cohorts—might become a constituency that candidates pursue. The long shot, if Obama wins big, is a larger electoral universe that forces Republicans to play catch-up. The party that spent decades stifling voter turnout, from illegal suppression to court-sanctioned ploys like ID requirements, could find electoral salvation depends on the ability to register its own new voters. Couple that grassroots pressure with an economic crisis stoking intense bipartisan populism, and a "new politics" might really be on the horizon. ARI MELBER

Ari Melber (arimelber.com) is The Nation*'s Net Movement correspondent.*

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Alexander Cockburn

The Election Is Over

Election day is officially November 4. A month earlier voters started mailing in their ballots. We can expect the usual uplifting essays, extolling the spectacle of millions of Americans peaceably exercising their democratic rights, so unlike in Cuba or North Korea.

Unusually early, the real election day this year fell on October 4, the day the House of Representatives finally approved the bailout bill already passed by the Senate two days earlier.

Real elections mostly come after the symbolic election day. They are staged, sometimes protracted events, designed to remind voters that no matter what they may have thought they were voting for when they went to the polls, no matter who the victor or what his pledges, reality is in charge.

Examples vivid in my memory include the arrival in Britain of a Labour government in the fall of 1964 after twelve years of Conservative rule. Hopes were for sweeping change in accord with Labour's Socialist program. The real election then took place, and the bankers voted no. Lord Cromer, governor of the Bank of England, told Wilson that there was a financial emergency: the international integrity of the pound sterling was being compromised. He advised the prime minister that Labour's plans for economic and social reform must be abandoned forthwith. Cromer carried the day.

The election of Jimmy Carter in 1976 was also a season of hope that a new era was dawning, particularly in the arena of foreign policy and the cold war. "If, after the inauguration," Carter's campaign manager, Hamilton Jordan, told the press, "you find Cy Vance as secretary of state and Zbigniew Brzezinski as head of national security, then I would say we failed. And I'd quit." Carter wanted George Ball as secretary of state, but in the backstage maneuverings of the real election the Israel lobby vetoed Ball. Carter was forced to pick Vance as secretary of state and the cold war fanatic Brzezinski as national security adviser. Jordan did not quit.

The real election in Bill Clinton's case took place after his election, when he swiftly indicated surrender by making Goldman Sachs's Robert Rubin his treasury secretary. By May 1993 he had signaled his total submission to the Wall Street banks and the end of any pretense—thin from the get-go—of economic change or social reform.

This year the economic crisis demanded an early real election, designed to fend off the admittedly very remote possibility—Rubin is Barack Obama's close economic adviser—that Obama, victorious in the November 4 election, might claim a reformer's mandate and seek to prize loose the stranglehold of Wall Street financiers on the economy.

On September 23 Obama stated on NBC that the crisis and the prospect of a huge bailout required bipartisan action and meant he likely would have to delay expansive spending programs outlined during his campaign for the White House. Thus did he surrender power even before he gained it. Simultaneously, McCain, endorsing the bailout, destroyed a golden opportunity to revive his candidacy by placing himself at the head of the Republican revolt and seizing the popular mood, which was and remains one of vitriolic fury at Wall Street and the bailout.

Dissent dwindled rapidly in the press as the Accredited Commentariat, from George Will on the right to Paul Krugman in the center, declared the bailout odious but necessary. The rebellion of the House Republicans was an unexpected bump in the road. They were execrated as "irresponsible" along with the ninety-five Democrats who joined them.

At this point the last, best weapon of the Real Electioneers sidled onto the stage. On October 2, Representative Brad Sherman, a California Democrat and opponent of the bailout, stated in the House that members of Congress were threatened that "there would be martial law in America if we voted no." A day earlier, on our *CounterPunch* site, Doug Valentine had pointed out that George Bush was equipped with such powers, having issued in May 2007 National Security Presidential Directive 51 and Homeland Security Presidential Directive 20. These directives gave Bush the authority to assure the "Continuity of Government" in the event of a "Catastrophic Emergency"—which resulted in, among other things, some extraordinary disruption of the economy.

As the Senate voted, Obama once again affirmed publicly that he accepted the verdict of the real election. He told reporters in Clearwater, Florida, on September 24 that "issues like bankruptcy reform, which are very important to Democrats, is probably something that we shouldn't try to do in this piece of legislation." In addition, he said that his proposed economic stimulus program "is not necessarily something that we should have in this package." Nine days later, cowed by a strike of capital on Wall Street, battered by charges of reckless endangerment of the American Way of Life, recalcitrants in the Congressional Black Caucus having been hectored by Obama, House resistance dwindled and the Paulson bill rolled through.

As the economic crisis continued unabated, people said this showed that the bailout bill had been useless. Not true at all. Its paramount importance was as a show of force, as dramatic as nineteenth-century cavalry cutting down demonstrators at Peterloo. As an instigator of beneficial change, the Clinton administration was over six months after election day 1992. Assuming he wins, Obama has beaten the speed of Bill Clinton's 1993 collapse by almost seven months.

But hold! you cry. Obama may enter office with a secret plan. Even FDR campaigned in 1932 for a balanced budget. And anyway, Obama and Biden will save us from Sarah Palin, Alaska's answer to Eva Perón! My friends, the ebullient Palin, a provincial right-wing populist in the Poujade tradition, is a distraction from the uncomfortable truth. After the October coup, and Obama's meek surrender, the November ballot is merely a coda. ■

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Katha Pollitt

Follow-ups for Sarah Palin

What will happen with contraception and abortion if John McCain wins the election? You wouldn't think this would be such a puzzler. McCain has been in the Senate for a quarter of a century, after all, during which time he has voted against women controlling their own fertility nearly every chance he got. His campaign website prominently features a section called "Human Dignity and the Sanctity of Life," whose first heading is "Overturning Roe v. Wade." It states: "John McCain believes Roe v. Wade is a flawed decision that must be overturned, and as president he will nominate judges who understand that the courts should not be in the business of legislating from the bench." He has expressed his admiration for Supreme Court Justices Roberts and Alito. He chose as his running mate a far-right Christian with extreme antiabortion views. And yet, even now, with less than a month to go, voters are a bit like the student in the old joke who, when asked which was the bigger problem in his high school, ignorance or apathy, responded, I don't know and I don't care!

Unfortunately, the media have abetted both attitudes by not asking the right questions, the right follow-ups—a lost art, apparently—or, in the case of Gwen Ifill, by not asking at all. (What was the matter with her, anyway? When she moderated the 2004 vice presidential debate, she stumped Cheney and Edwards by asking what they'd do about high rates of HIV among black women—of which both men appeared unaware. This time, as Ruth Rosen has pointed out on *AlterNet*, Ifill asked not one question that related to women, although women supposedly hold the election in our soft little hands. Equal pay. Supreme Court. Violence Against Women Act. Making women pay for their own rape kits. Nada on these high-profile news items.) In her justly celebrated CBS interview, Katie Couric did her best to penetrate the evasive blather—culture of life, respect for other opinions, make adoption easier, blah-blah-blah—with which Sarah Palin met a straightforward question about whether abortion should be illegal for a 15-year-old raped by her father:

> **Couric:** But ideally, you think it should be illegal for a girl who was raped or the victim of incest to get an abortion?
>
> **Palin:** I'm saying that, personally, I would counsel the person to choose life, despite horrific, horrific circumstances that this person would find themselves in. And, um, if you're asking, though, kind of foundationally here, should anyone end up in jail for having an…abortion, absolutely not. That's nothing I would ever support.

Oh, Katie, you let her slip away. Sure, parsing Palin's English is like swimming in salad, but don't you know that jailing women is not what outlawing abortion was ever about? When abortion was illegal in the United States, it was almost unheard of for a woman to be sent to prison for having one. Women were picked up by the police, forcibly examined, threatened with public humiliation and jail, their names were published in the papers, they were hounded in their hospital beds for testimony after botched procedures and compelled to testify in court—but it was abortion providers who went to prison. Today the people who want to recriminalize abortion are careful to remove moral agency from women who seek abortion: they are "confused" victims of bullying men or parents, feminists, the abortion "industry," the "culture of death." Abortion is the only "crime" that allows the person who seeks, pays for and instigates it to be largely excused from responsibility—because antichoicers know that Americans don't want their daughters, sisters, girlfriends, wives and mothers behind bars. Nor do they want to imprison parents, friends, husbands and boyfriends as accessories. Punishment is for the doctor—up to ten years in prison under the law the Louisiana State Legislature passed to go into effect if *Roe* is overturned.

Banning abortion isn't primarily about putting people in prison, anyway. It isn't even about stopping abortion. It's about using the threat of arrest to push it underground—to make it shameful, hard to find, dangerous and humiliating. The right questions to ask Sarah Palin would be:

§ In 1999 John McCain said he would not support repeal of *Roe v. Wade* because without it "X number of women" would undergo "illegal and dangerous operations." Now you both want *Roe* to go. Why wasn't he right in the first place?

§ You want to make abortion illegal except to save the woman's life. Recently in Poland, a woman sought an abortion because she risked blindness if she continued her pregnancy. Should she have been forced to give birth? That woman did lose most of her eyesight. What would you say to her?

§ You've said you support contraception, yet many abortion opponents consider the birth control pill not a contraceptive but an abortifacient. Do you think the pill causes abortion? Should it be illegal too?

§ Some people have suggested that as mayor of Wasilla you required rape victims to pay for their own rape kits because part of the procedure included offering them emergency contraception, which you believe causes abortion. Others think you were trying to save money. What was it?

§ In the *Washington Post* Linda Hirshman speculated that if *Roe* were overturned, some states might seek to make it a crime for a pregnant resident to travel to another state to obtain a legal abortion. Would you favor such laws? If so, how would you enforce them? If not, why not? If a fertilized egg or embryo or fetus is a person, why should it lose its right to life because it is forcibly transported across state lines?

I realize reproductive rights are not at the top of the list of people's concerns. Let's hope we don't regret that come November 5. ■

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THE NEW SENATE MAJORITY?

Will the Democrats win a majority that's big enough to forge a new Washington consensus?

by JOHN NICHOLS

The first sign that Oregon Senator Gordon Smith, once thought to be among the more secure of the Republicans seeking re-election this year, recognized he was in trouble came in June, when his campaign seemed to claim the endorsement of a colleague seeking the presidency. And it wasn't John McCain, the candidate Smith had endorsed long before most other GOP leaders. A TV ad for Smith, who has cultivated a maverick image while voting with the Bush administration more than 90 percent of the time, began by asking, "Who says Gordon Smith helped lead the fight for better gas mileage and a cleaner environment?" After a dramatic pause came the answer—"Barack Obama"—along with images of Obama's website and campaign materials.

Smith's commercial was based on a false premise and an inaccurate reading of statements by Obama, who backs Democrat Jeff Merkley's progressive populist challenge to the two-term Republican incumbent. If re-elected, Smith would almost certainly devote his energies to blocking the initiatives of an Obama administration. Merkley is opposed to the Iraq War, concerned about Bush administration threats to the Constitution and inclined toward the hometown side of the Main Street versus Wall Street calculus that is playing out in this period of turbulence. He was up early and hard with an ad bashing Smith's backing of Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson's bailout bill. Like many of the best Senate challengers this year, Merkley stands a little to the left of Obama on trade policy and protecting civil liberties. And he's precisely the sort of experienced battler—a state legislative leader with a background as a Pentagon analyst and Congressional aide—who could be a muscular player in a supersized Senate Democratic caucus.

Smith's Obama-embracing ad highlighted the desperation of GOP senators who have recognized that McCain isn't much help in their uphill battle just to maintain their weakened position in the chamber they lost control of in 2006. It also illustrates the complex dynamics at play in the thirty-five Senate races that will be decided November 4. With the authority to approve cabinet and judicial appointments, treaties and trade deals, as well as arcane rules that allow a minority to block major legislation, the Senate can make or break a presidency—especially one as ambitious as Obama's most ardent backers see in the offing.

Like the House, where Democrats are well positioned to expand on their thirty-six-seat majority, the Senate will almost certainly be in Democratic hands come January. But the current 51-to-49 Democratic advantage is hardly sufficient to deliver on Obama's promise of "change we can believe in." And as the volatility of the presidential race—as well as aftershocks from the Wall Street meltdown and sudden shifts in Iraq and Afghanistan—dominates the media, it is difficult to pinpoint the extent to which Democrats will advance. There is no mystery, however, about the core question of the 2008 Congressional competition: will an election that favors Democratic Senate candidates more than any in recent decades (twenty-three Republican seats are up for election, many of them held by vulnerable incumbents, as opposed to just twelve by Democrats, all of whom are leading in the polls) provide the party with a suf-

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ficient majority to forge a new Washington consensus—a dramatic break from the crises, corruptions and compromises of the Bush/Cheney era?

"Bush didn't move our country off track by himself—he had a caucus full of Senate Republicans enabling him every step of the way," explains Chuck Schumer, who is reprising his 2006 role as a chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC). "For six years in the majority, Republicans rubber-stamped Bush's failed policies, and for the last two years in the minority, they have obstructed meaningful change. Republicans have filibustered a record number of times, stopping legislation to end the war in Iraq, blocking efforts to reduce gas prices and even obstructing expanded healthcare for our children.… It's clear that in order for President Obama to move our country forward, he'll need more than the razor-thin majority we currently hold in the Senate."

Schumer's goal of securing sixty seats, and with them the ability to block Republican filibusters, is audacious—but not unimaginable. The less ambitious goal of growing the caucus to fifty-seven—thus ending the need to rely on the McCain-backing Joe Lieberman and a handful of hypercautious Southern and Western senators to maintain a majority—is more than just imaginable; it is a very real prospect. Indeed, as veteran analyst Charlie Cook noted in late September, "Holding its [Senate] losses down to four seats would be manna from heaven for the GOP."

A Democratic caucus that does not have to bow to its most conservative members will be freer to press Obama to take progressive positions.

If the Senate Democrats get to the upper fifties, a President Obama and Democratic senators will be able to reach out to GOP moderates—Arlen Specter, Olympia Snowe, Richard Lugar—to break deadlocks on issues from the Iraq occupation to healthcare. Obama will have more freedom in making judicial appointments. And a Democratic caucus that does not have to bow to its most conservative members will be freer to press Obama to take progressive positions, especially when it comes to trade and fiscal policy, in which this year's Democratic candidates tend to respond more to the needs of workers, farmers, consumers and the environment than to the whims of Wall Street. With the fiscal challenges an Obama administration is sure to face, given the looming harsh recession, a cooperative Senate will be essential if he is to implement the healthcare, education or housing programs on which he has campaigned. And if a continued downturn requires him to conceive a new New Deal, he will be able to implement it only if the Senate is with him. Conversely, if McCain wins in November, a solidly Democratic Senate would be the primary barrier to his agenda on economic, social and, above all, military matters.

The first steps toward substantially improving the Senate Democratic count are easily identified. Three of the four seats that are likely to slip from the GOP's grasp are in states where Republican incumbents are quitting: Virginia, where former Democratic Governor Mark Warner holds a daunting poll lead; New Mexico, where popular Democratic Congressman Tom Udall is way ahead and the National Republican Senatorial Committee recently quit the fight; and Colorado, where Udall's cousin Mark, also a Congressman, has maintained a steady lead in the face of a $10 million campaign by Republicans and GOP-allied groups to take him down. Both Udalls highlight their opposition to authorizing the 2002 Iraq War resolution, and to the Patriot Act in 2001. They are, as well, heirs to the Western environmentalist tradition of their fathers, Stewart (Tom) and Mo (Mark), and have made alternative energy development central to their platforms.

For Democrats to surge into a dominant position, however, they have to do more than collect open seats. They must beat GOP incumbents in states like Oregon, New Hampshire and Minnesota—where Al Franken has overcome early stumbles and vicious Republican attacks to pull narrowly ahead of Norm Coleman. Voters in these states were never that enthusiastic about the Bush agenda and have soured on it so much that they might be inclined to change not just the partisan hue of the White House but Washington as a whole. To be sure, not all the Democratic challengers in these states are liberals. New Hampshire's Jeanne Shaheen, for instance, is a classic Clinton Democrat with a tendency toward "no new taxes" rhetoric and a record of having supported the Iraq War resolution. But her election would be an essential building block in the development of a strong Democratic majority. To get that strong majority, Democrats will also need some lucky breaks in states that backed Bush and will likely back McCain but that have senators, such as Alaska's Ted Stevens and Kentucky's Mitch McConnell, whose personal and political misdeeds have left them in virtual ties with well-known and well-financed Democratic challengers [see Bob Moser, "Kentucky at War," October 1, 2007].

Finally, the Dems must capitalize on what is expected to be a historic African-American turnout in Southern states like Mississippi—where former Democratic Governor Ronnie Musgrove is running nearly even with appointed GOP Senator Roger Wicker in most polls—that are solidly for McCain in the presidential race but that could see Democratic contenders with deep roots and populist campaigns attract just enough McCain voters to secure seats. Musgrove is placing a heavy emphasis on his opposition to free-trade deals favored by the administration and most Senate Republicans but disdained by hard-pressed working-class voters. The same goes for North Carolina Democrat Kay Hagan, who has pulled ahead of incumbent Elizabeth Dole, a firm free trader, by telling voters that "for too many years…trade deals have been written to pull down wages and working conditions in the US and other developed countries, instead of pulling them up in the developing world. As corporate profits and CEO pay have soared, the incomes of ordinary North Carolinians have stagnated."

The pitfalls of the autumn campaign, with its fits and starts since Obama's triumphal acceptance speech at the Democratic convention in August, have tamped down the talk among his more enthusiastic backers of a long-coattails landslide like those of Lyndon Johnson in 1964 or Ronald Reagan in 1980, when

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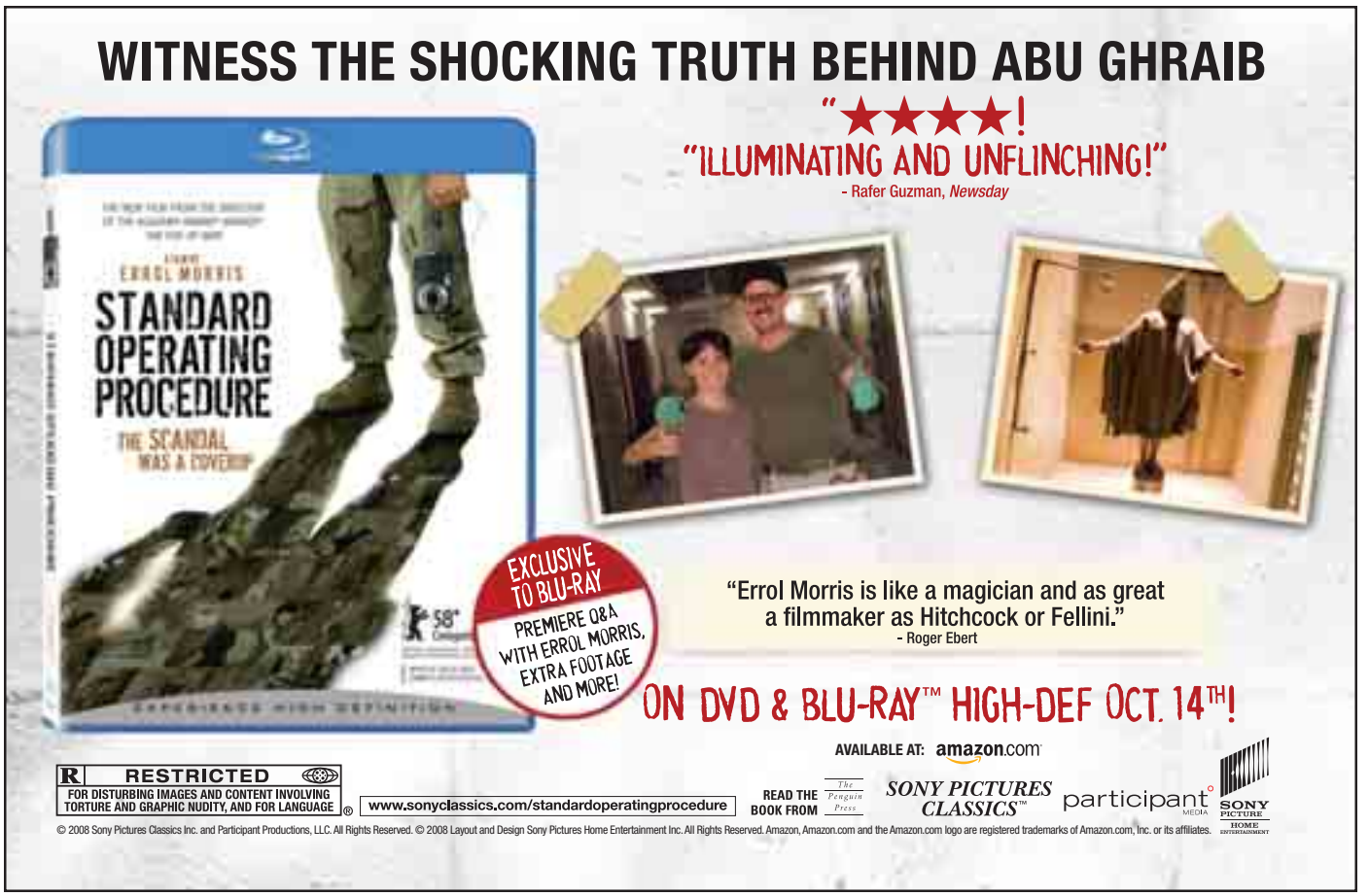
not just a party's presidential candidate but large Senate majorities are swept into Washington. Among other things, McCain's selection of social conservative Sarah Palin as his running mate has renewed GOP hopes that they can turn out enough base voters to secure vulnerable incumbents—especially Alaska's Stevens, who despite his recent indictment hopes to ride Palin's home-state apron strings to victory over impressive Democratic challenger Mark Begich.

But Democratic senatorial prospects were never pegged entirely, or even substantially, to Obama's chances. As the senator from Illinois surged in mid-winter, the sense that 2008 might be a transformational year for Democrats helped Schumer with late-stage recruitment of able candidates and establishing a fundraising advantage over Republicans. That advantage has held despite Schumer's having to compete with Obama's relentless demands on donors to fund his presidential run.

The interplay between the Obama campaign and those of Senate Democrats has not always been smooth. Obama wants a big majority; he bluntly admits that "big changes don't happen without big Senate majorities." But he has rebuffed pleas from majority leader Harry Reid that he release some of his money to help Senate candidates. Faced with the prospect of heavy late-stage spending by "independent" groups that favor McCain, Obama chose to keep his cash and instead pen fundraising letters for Schumer's DSCC, as has his running mate, Senator Joe Biden. (Biden is running both for the vice presidency and his Senate seat this year, as is allowed under Delaware law.)

While they may have wrangled a bit over money, Senate Democrats and their candidates have established a smart working relationship with Obama—as the June dust-up between Smith and challenger Merkley revealed. Obama is popular in Oregon, a liberal-leaning state that has voted Democratic in the past five presidential elections. His campaign has been on the ground in Oregon—where he won the May primary with almost 60 percent of the vote—for the better part of a year. Long before Obama drew 75,000 people to a spring rally in Portland, Smith's aides were concerned that the Obama campaign would swell the state's fall turnout with first-time and infrequent voters who would show up to back Obama and then start ticking the names of down-ticket Democrats.

It was a reasonable concern, one that might in another year have been effectively countered by the sly strategies underpinning the Smith ad. But the Republican's scheme ran into a roadblock: Schumer, the hyperpartisan and hyperaggressive New York senator who managed his party out of minority status in 2006 by focusing unprecedented resources on second- and third-tier contests the party had historically neglected, had recruited a savvy challenger who was unwilling to cede Smith an inch. With Schumer's assistance, Merkley had assembled a crack campaign team that instantly condemned the ad as false, produced a video clip of Obama telling Portland's *Willamette Week*, "I think Gordon Smith's problem is that he rarely breaks away from George Bush and the Republican agenda that I think has done this country great damage," and put the icing on the cake with a fresh statement from the Obama camp saying,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"Barack Obama has a long record of bipartisan accomplishment and we appreciate that it is respected by his Democratic and Republican colleagues in the Senate. But in this race, Oregonians should know that Barack Obama supports Jeff Merkley for Senate. Merkley will help Obama bring about the fundamental change we need in Washington."

The smooth coordination between the Obama and Merkley campaigns worked wonders. Merkley—more closely aligned with the popular Obama than ever before, and capitalizing on a series of missteps by the incumbent—moved by mid-July into a narrow lead, which he maintains to this day. *Oregonian* political writer Jeff Mapes says, "We've clearly got a heck of a race on our hands."

As it happens, Democrats have got a heck of a lot of races on their hands this year. The combination of Obama's base-building candidacy and Schumer's recruiting and fundraising has paid off handsomely. Democrats can still speak credibly not just about electing Obama but about providing a president Obama with the sort of governing majority that makes the promise of change much more than a rhetorical flourish. ■

Joe Versus the Embargo

In South Florida, Joe Garcia is taking on the GOP and the Cuban establishment.

by ETHAN PORTER

It is half past midnight on a summer Friday, and Joe Garcia, the Democratic candidate for Florida's 25th Congressional District, is holding court outside a South Beach bar. With his mass of dark curls (friends call it the "Joe-fro") plopped atop a tall but none-too-slender frame, he has to do very little to attract attention. Compound his physical heft with his prominence in the local community, and it's obvious why every few minutes another twentysomething spots him and says hello. "We have no idea who that girl is," Garcia whispers sheepishly after one enthusiastic young woman greets him with an air of familiarity.

In the eyes of many young Cuban-Americans, Garcia, 44, is the next political rock star. In the eyes of the Democratic Party, he may be just the right candidate to break the Republicans' longtime stranglehold on the region. But to older Cuban-Americans, especially those who are part of the historic "exile community," Garcia is an ungrateful former favorite son who represents all that is wrong with the younger set, particularly in his skepticism toward the Cuban embargo and the old-line, hardline mentality that gave birth to it.

The exile old guard has triumphed in South Florida since almost immediately after the Castro revolution. And since Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, the Republican Party has reaped the benefits. The most popular strategy for Republicans running statewide is to jack up the score among Cuban-American voters, who are numerous enough to offset losses among Jews, African-Americans and union members. It was the basis for Republican Charlie Crist's gubernatorial victory in 2006, as well as that of his predecessor, Jeb Bush. In 2006 more than 72 percent of all Cuban-Americans in Miami-Dade and Broward counties identified as Republicans.

Garcia's candidacy is part of what might be called the Democrats' triangle offense in the region. Frustrated with targeting specific districts and losing, the party has attempted to harness the political wind at its back and put forth three strong candidates to challenge three Republican incumbents simultaneously. In the district next to the 25th, Raul Martinez, a Cuban-American dead ringer for Boris Yeltsin who served for more than twenty years as the mayor of Hialeah, is taking on Lincoln Diaz-Balart. In the 18th, there's Annette Taddeo, a businesswoman running a bit of a long-shot campaign against the relatively moderate Ileana Ros-Lehtinen.

JOHN WATSON-RILEY/AP

But it is the candidacy of Joe Garcia, a longtime community and party activist, that poses the largest threat to the virulently anti-Castro, pro-embargo status quo. Garcia is running against Mario Diaz-Balart, younger brother of Lincoln, who entered Congress in 2002 and whose district encompasses Miami-Dade and most of the state's southern tip. An early October Telemundo poll showed Garcia trailing by two points, 41-43 percent, within the margin of error, the best of the three challengers. Diaz-Balart recently agreed to a last-minute debate, to be held October 10, a sure sign of trouble for any incumbent.

While Garcia is only a little younger than Diaz-Balart, he's the leading member of a generational wave that some think is due to break and, in the process, usher out the way politics has worked here for decades. "They're not just running against me," Garcia says of his opponents. "They're running against history." But to make history, Garcia will have to defeat it first; as his opponents know well, history—long bloodlines and memories—is pervasive here, as inescapable as the sweltering sun.

Ethan Porter is associate editor of Democracy: A Journal of Ideas.

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ABOVE: A student journalist is pepper-sprayed covering protests outside the Republican National Convention on Sept. 1, 2008. AP photographer Matt Rourke was arrested and detained after taking this photo.

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Cuba policy was once all that South Florida politics orbited around; Garcia intends to reform the embargo and make US-Cuba relations only a part of the political constellation alongside more routine kitchen-table issues. Garcia's professional life began in 1988, when Jorge Mas Canosa—widely credited with creating Cuban-American power by founding the Cuban American National Foundation—tapped him, while still in law school, to lead something called the Exodus Relief Fund. The fund, which operated under CANF, was set up to reunite family members who had fled to America from Castro's Cuba with those who had fled to other countries, like Spain and Venezuela. Footage from family reunions that the project put together is now on YouTube, most of it featuring weeping family members embracing after a long time apart.

At the beginning of his career, working with an organization as closely associated with Reagan Republicanism as CANF, Garcia was as much in favor of the embargo as any hardliner. But now he's the local torchbearer for the opposition, which argues that the embargo hurts the Cuban people, particularly dissidents. Garcia favors allowing more family visits and increasing the amount of money Cuban-Americans are allowed to send back to their relatives still living under Castro. Garcia is not advocating that the embargo end entirely, at least not yet. He's interested in relaxing its restrictions, especially those it places on ordinary citizens in the United States and Cuba. "People in Cuba are victims. Why the fuck are we squeezing them?" he asks.

This proposed policy change may seem modest, but in South Florida, it's nearly heretical. The fact that it's Garcia making the skeptical argument appears to have struck a nerve. After his stint with Exodus, Garcia went on to lead the usually hawkish CANF, which is widely credited as the institutional power most responsible for forging the anti-Castro, pro-embargo, bipartisan coalition in the early 1980s that has dominated the region, as well as the halls of Congress, ever since. That a former leader of CANF would oppose the embargo is greeted with bafflement by such people, who see it as a slap in the face of tradition. "Garcia," I am told by one long-term Democrat in his 60s who is remaining neutral in this race, "is an opportunist."

Garcia's opportunity, as it were, depends on his ability to forge a coalition of multiethnic union members, businessmen and an emerging cohort of young Cuban-Americans intent on breaking from the path followed by their parents. Felice Gorordo and Tony Jimenez, two men at the bar with Garcia, are emblematic of this new generation. They spent their early 20s working at the lower levels of the current Bush White House and were strong believers in the embargo. But they left after Bush's re-election, disgruntled and disillusioned, convinced that the administration's harsh rhetoric on Castro was illusory and unlikely to bear results. To them, even the embargo is an illusion. "What embargo?" Gorordo asks, pointing to the hundreds of millions of dollars that have seeped into the island over the past few years. "Cuba policy has reached the point of absurdity," Jimenez tells me later. Gorordo and Jimenez are now Garcia supporters.

At a mid-June AFL-CIO labor rally on the streets of Miami, Garcia is showered with adoration from the picketers and local leaders the moment he steps out of his car. He rushes to the median, holding up a prolabor sign, and car honk after car honk creates a cacophony of support. The union members are of all ethnic backgrounds; they care about the economic crisis and achieving universal healthcare, both of which Garcia has prioritized. Perhaps not surprisingly, no one can recall Diaz-Balart ever attending a similar rally.

Later that night, Garcia is scheduled to speak at a tony meeting of the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's national board. While most of the attendees are Republicans, their soft spot for Garcia is obvious. Neither of the Diaz-Balart brothers is in attendance. Several self-identified Republicans—including a man introduced to me as "the father of outsourcing"—say they will break ranks to support Garcia. "Joe is very pragmatic," one conservative supporter explains. It's no wonder that Garcia has raised almost $1.3 million, an astonishingly large sum that has caused Realclearpolitics.com to rate the race as one of the most competitive in the country. (Diaz-Balart's previous challenger never crossed the six-figure threshold.)

But Garcia's emerging coalition might not be enough to overcome the deep-seated pro-embargo mind-set of the older generation. A poll taken over the summer showed Garcia trailing Diaz-Balart badly among all Cuban-Americans, 65 percent to 26 percent. At the Versailles restaurant—a temple for the old guard, where in the front vestibule a local newspaper's headline touts John McCain's Experiencia y Patriotismo!—I have lunch with Nelis Rojas de Morales, secretary general of the Coordinadora Internacional de Ex-Prisioneros Politicos Cubanos (the International Coordinator of Cuban Ex-Political Prisoners). She was born in Cuba, imprisoned for opposing the Castro regime, then imprisoned again in Venezuela. To her, the question of whether to support Joe Garcia is secondary to the larger question: how, and when, can Fidel Castro be overthrown? I ask her if she thinks it ought to be violent. "If necessary," she replies. "To change the system little by little is to lack knowledge of that system. The Communist system does not change."

Down the street from the Versailles sits Sentir Cubano, a store that specializes in Cuban tchotchkes. Everything in the store—pictures of elegant night life, posters of old movie stars—depicts a Cuba before Castro. One of the bestselling items is a full-size replica of the Havana phone book from 1958, the moment before the revolution. The store's manager, Maria Vasquez, is friendly with Garcia but does not support him.

Garcia wants to end all this—the bellicosity of de Morales, the obsessive nostalgia of Sentir Cubano. Yet rumors of the old guard's demise have been exaggerated before. "Twenty years ago, back then I thought the change was going to be more rapid," says Lisandro Pérez, a sociology professor at Florida International University. "The fact that here we are in 2008, saying, 'Gee, we are going to see change,' when we should have seen it a little while ago. The older generation has died off. What's interesting is the ability of that historic exile community to reproduce [its] message into the culture." Garcia comes out of that community but has since diverged onto a broader path. Whether the community is ready to follow him, however, is an open question. ■

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Wrong Prescription

McCain would encourage employers to cut coverage. No joke: that's his healthcare plan.

by J. LESTER FEDER

Deregulation has worked so well for Wall Street, John McCain wrote recently, that we should use the same approach to fix our healthcare system. In the September/October issue of *Contingencies*, the magazine of the American Academy of Actuaries, the Republican presidential candidate asserts, "Opening up the health insurance market to more vigorous nationwide competition, as we have done over the last decade in banking, would provide more choices of innovative products less burdened by the worst excesses of state-based regulation."

McCain was writing just before Wall Street collapsed, and he obviously did not think Americans needed to be insured against the failure of a deregulated financial sector. Likewise, he was not concerned that the 53 percent of Americans who get insurance from their employers need protection from the risk of losing it. In fact, he's hoping they will lose their employer coverage, betting they'll be better off on their own in a deregulated market.

McCain's healthcare plan replaces the tax incentives for employers to offer health insurance with a tax credit for people to buy insurance on their own. This proposal embraces a "consumer directed" approach to healthcare, a model that has become popular among free-market conservatives. The more directly people bear the costs of their care, the thinking goes, the more they will drive down costs by becoming better shoppers. Under this model, employees, not employers, should pay for their care.

Al Hubbard, a former White House economic adviser who devised a similar proposal unsuccessfully advanced by George W. Bush in 2007, explains this approach by suggesting we imagine a world in which employers offer "food insurance" instead of health insurance. If an insurance company paid for your groceries as it does your healthcare bills, he argues, "pretty soon you would start buying caviar, the most expensive steak, and you would start buying more than you needed." The hope is that if we pay more of our costs, we will pass up "caviar care" for the equivalent of meat and potatoes, and the free market will offer more efficient care in order to lure customers. "When you're paying for it yourself," Hubbard says, "you don't put the bells and whistles on there. You buy what you need."

But critics who have watched the Bush administration implement many less ambitious consumer-directed reforms—from the creation of health savings accounts to state experiments in Medicaid—say they can work only in an idealized market, not the one we actually have. If the McCain plan were to go into effect as proposed, somewhere between 10 million and 28 million Americans insured through their employers would wind up in a market that, despite regulations, is already badly broken. Many would likely pay more for less coverage, and those with pre-existing health problems might be denied insurance altogether.

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The McCain plan would jeopardize what coverage there is for millions while doing little or nothing to help the 47 million uninsured Americans. Forget meat and potatoes—many people may be lucky to get something closer to a cup of instant noodles.

The cornerstone of the McCain plan is the elimination of an existing tax break known as the "employer exclusion." Under our current system, neither employers nor employees pay taxes on workers' health insurance premiums. If McCain gets his way, employees would have to pay taxes on premiums as income. So if your employer-sponsored plan costs $4,704—the average for an individual in an employer plan—you will owe taxes on an additional $4,704 of income.

This would raise the taxes on a huge number of Americans. To offset this, McCain would give each individual a $2,500 tax credit. (Families—whose plans cost an average of $12,680—would get $5,000.) Those who do not receive employer insurance would be able to use this credit to buy insurance on their own. If your health insurance costs less than the tax credit, you could deposit the remainder in a tax-free health savings account (HSA).

Thomas Miller, former senior health economist for the Joint Economic Committee in Congress, who has advised

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the McCain campaign, says this would make the tax system more progressive. The employer exclusion costs taxpayers more than $212 billion per year, he notes, subsidizing employer benefits while giving nothing to those without employer insurance.

Critics of the McCain plan agree—if they were designing the system from scratch, they would get rid of the employer exclusion, along with other reforms. But it anchors the employer-based system that insures more than half of Americans. By eliminating it, says Linda Blumberg, principal research associate at the Urban Institute's Health Policy Center, McCain is "basically undermining the employer-sponsored insurance market." And he's offering nothing reliable in its place.

The employer exclusion is one of the few remaining incentives for employers to offer coverage, which is increasingly expensive. Premiums have been rising roughly 10 percent a year since 2000, and as a result the number of employers providing health insurance has fallen 8 percent in that time. The employer exclusion allows businesses, in effect, to give their workers more take-home pay than they could by giving them the same amount in cash. Employers would lose this financial motivation to continue coverage, and the individual healthcare tax credits would give cover to bosses who want to shed this expensive benefit.

McCain's plan could steer a wobbly system straight into the ground. And those who need coverage most would likely feel the impact first.

Some younger and healthier workers could come out ahead, at least at first. They might find policies that cost less than their $2,500 tax credit and invest the rest tax-free in an HSA. But they would likely enter plans that are far less generous than the ones offered by their employers. A typical family that is buying insurance on its own has to pay more than $2,000 above what an employer would pay for an identical policy, or face deductibles that are almost three times higher. Even those who found they could afford coverage in the first years of the McCain plan might quickly be priced out of the market—the tax credit does not increase with the cost of premiums.

If you already have a condition that requires medical care, you are in real trouble. Even if you can find an insurer who will sell you a policy, it may be exorbitantly expensive and still not cover you when you get sick. A recent survey found that more than two-thirds of people who considered buying their own policies found it difficult or impossible to find affordable coverage. This is in a market where some states currently prohibit insurers from discriminating based on health status. But McCain would effectively eliminate these state regulations by allowing insurers to sell plans across state lines.

To cover these uninsured Americans, McCain proposes expanding the high-risk pools that are in place in thirty-four states. These are misleadingly called "guaranteed access plans"—they are neither guaranteed nor do they ensure access to care. In order to qualify, you must be denied coverage because of a pre-existing condition. And they are critically underfunded, so states often cap enrollments and, perversely, exclude coverage for the very pre-existing conditions that force you into the plan. The plans do help a small number of people, but putting them to work the way McCain proposes, economists estimate, would cost as much as $100 billion. McCain proposes spending $7 billion to $10 billion. "It's a disaster waiting to happen," says the Urban Institute's Linda Blumberg.

Consumer-directed healthcare proposals, says Karen Pollitz, project director of the Georgetown University Health Policy Institute, are the "triumph of politics over substance." In 2003 the Bush administration passed legislation to create an alternative to traditional insurance: high-deductible plans paired with HSAs. According to a study by the General Accounting Office, the small number of Americans who have opened HSAs had an average income of $139,000, and 41 percent of account holders made no withdrawals. "They are being sold as a tool for promoting cost containment and consumer empowerment," says Pollitz, "when in fact they're tax shelters."

The Bush administration also streamlined the process for states to make changes to Medicaid, the program for low-income families, paving the way for the replacement of the entitlement with a market model. At least five states have implemented experiments with proposals touted by groups like Newt Gingrich's Center for Health Transformation. The boldest of these went into effect in January in Indiana, giving low-income Hoosiers health accounts to which they contribute on a sliding scale. Very few data are available because it is such a new program. Judith Solomon, senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, says there are concerns about the quality of benefits, higher administrative costs and the ability of the poorest participants to make even minimal contributions.

"The national plan that McCain has pretty much fits into the same frame" as that of Bush, Solomon explains. "I wouldn't expect [McCain] to be much different."

In the 1980s then–Republican Congressman Bill Thomas of California began pushing precursors to the McCain plan, which he said would cause health insurance to be sold more like charter flights than regularly scheduled service. Charters are cheaper, he says, because the carrier has only one destination, and it flies only when all the seats are filled. In his vision, healthcare plans would lay out the minimal benefits packages needed to book a viable number of enrollees. This analogy captures the fundamental problem with the consumer-directed model for Pollitz. Health insurance "isn't like a chartered jet," she says. "It's really more like oxygen. If the plane loses altitude and those masks come down…that is not a time for market forces to take over." Twenty percent of patients—pregnant women and people with chronic diseases like diabetes and cancer—account for 80 percent of healthcare costs. Presumably, no plan is going to want to carry the burden of these expensive patients.

The McCain plan could steer a system that is already on a wobbly course straight into the ground. And those who need coverage the most will likely be the first to feel the impact. ■

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Professor Timothy Taylor is Managing Editor of the prominent *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, published by the American Economic Association. He earned his M.Econ. from Stanford University. While teaching at the University of Minnesota, he was named a Distinguished Lecturer by the university's Department of Economics.

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Can Obama Reform Healthcare?

He calls for universal coverage—but that's hard to get if insurance companies run the show.

by TRUDY LIEBERMAN

During the campaign Barack Obama has talked about healthcare on and off—more on during the primary campaign, when Hillary Clinton pushed him about whether people should be required to buy insurance; more off when healthcare has been eclipsed as a red-hot issue, such as during the financial crisis. When he has talked about healthcare, his oratory has been short on details and punctuated by twin themes: a call for universal coverage and for reducing the average family's insurance premium by $2,500. Obama has consistently stuck to those points, even though there has been little media examination of what they really mean and, more important, whether they are achievable.

For starters, Obama's plan is not a true universal health insurance model like the ones found in the rest of the developed world, a point many people do not understand because the word "universal" has been so misused in the campaign by candidates as well as the media. In the national health insurance systems of other countries, citizens are entitled to healthcare as a basic right, and everyone pays taxes to fund the services they receive. Those systems are universal and accountable to the public, not to shareholders of private companies, which is the case in the United States. Medical costs are more tightly controlled, and most of those truly universal systems deliver better care at far less cost than the US system. Obama has repeatedly rejected an immediate shift to such a system, generally called "single payer" in America; in an August town hall meeting in Albuquerque, he said, "Given that a lot of people work for insurance companies, a lot of people work for HMOs, you've got a whole system of institutions that have been set up." When a voter asked, "Why not single payer?" Obama replied that people don't have time to wait for such a truly universal plan: "They need relief now. So my attitude is, let's build up the system we got, let's make it more efficient. We may over time—as we make the system more efficient and everybody's covered—decide that there are other ways for us to provide care more effectively."

Obama and his health advisers propose to make the system more efficient and cover everybody by enhancing the country's so-called public-private partnership. In effect, the Obama plan, by offering subsidies to those who are uninsured, would deliver more business to companies already profiting handsomely from the peculiarly American system of health insurance. If his plan survives the legislative process and all works according to his policy prescriptions, somehow the country will get closer to universal coverage. Millions of people, however, will still be left out—unable to qualify for the public programs yet also unable to afford the ever increasing premiums of private ones. The exact number was a matter of contention during the primaries.

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It's hard to cover everybody in a system where health insurance is not required (Obama's plan mandates coverage only for children), where the price of care is out of reach for so many and where insurance companies make money by denying coverage to those who are sick. Yet it is on these very points that Obama's ideas for reform have been frustratingly vague. His aides have said they are going to leave it up to the legislative process. During the debates on the Democratic platform, Michael Yaki, who directed the platform meetings, said, "There's no real consensus yet on which is the best healthcare reform to do other than we are committed to universality and we're committed to getting there. We believe that as you make healthcare more affordable, people will be able to buy healthcare…. How we get there is a matter of the legislative process." That's tantamount to inviting powerful interests, with their formidable lobbying capacity—insurers, doctors, drug companies, hospitals—to have a strong hand in the outcome. So improving the current public-private partnership, such as it is, will not be easy.

§ Expanding coverage. Obama's plan builds on the premise that those who are already covered can keep the insurance they have, while proposing different routes for bringing more people under the insurance tent. One would lower eligibility requirements for Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program. Another would create a new national public plan for small businesses and individuals who are not covered by public programs like Medicaid and S-CHIP or who don't have an employer-based plan. In other words, it would be a

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place where the insurance disenfranchised could buy a policy. Obama has said that the model for this is the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, which allows federal workers to choose from a menu of policies offered by commercial insurance carriers. The government, like any other employer, pays a portion of the premium, and workers choose policies based on the cost to them and the benefits they offer.

Whether private insurers will provide the coverage or the government will—as in the Medicare-for-all plan promoted by groups like the coalition Health Care for America Now—is subject to debate. One thing is clear: people will need help buying policies. The average cost for a family on the open market is now upward of $12,000 a year. Obama has proposed more than $100 billion in subsidies and tax credits to make it easier, which he says would come from repeal of the Bush tax cuts for people making more than $250,000. That, however, would cover only half the cost, according to a July *New York Times* report, which challenged Obama's cost-containment strategy.

Another way Obama proposes to add more people to the insurance rolls is to require employers to provide "meaningful" coverage for their workers, but meaningful is not defined. If they don't, they'd have to pay into a fund to finance subsidies for those with low incomes so they can purchase private policies. This is roughly akin to the system in Massachusetts, where employers have to pay a token "fair share" penalty of $295 per worker each year if they don't offer coverage to their employees [see Lieberman, "No Rx in Massachusetts," September 18, 2006, and "Cautionary Healthcare Tales," thenation.com]. But the Massachusetts plan has run into a major budgeting shortfall, so state officials want to require more from employers—that they pay at least one-third of their workers' premiums or cover at least 25 percent of their employees. Rumblings that such changes could prompt a court challenge from employers just caused the state to delay the new requirements until January and exempt small business from paying more. That hardly bodes well for the same approach on a national scale.

§ Controlling costs. Throughout his campaign Obama has promised to lower premiums for the typical family of four by $2,500, which would make private coverage more affordable. He would do that not by cost controls such as global budgets (which limit the total amount that can be spent on healthcare, and which most foreign systems use to control spending) but through a variety of methods that experts doubt will have much impact. These include greater use of health information technology (IT) like patient databases and so-called disease-management programs—essentially, cost-saving through prevention, like reminding people to have regular checkups and tests, encouraging exercise and offering nutritional counseling. These are also embraced by John McCain and are already being implemented in some sectors. Healthcare consultant and blogger Robert Laszewski calls them "cost-containment lite." They don't do much to contain costs because they don't disturb the profits of the healthcare biggies—drug companies, doctors, hospitals and insurance companies.

Earlier this year the Congressional Budget Office threw cold water on the potential savings from improved health IT. While small-scale savings are possible, said budget director Peter Orszag, to get maximum savings the whole country would have to adopt the technology, something that's not likely to happen soon. While no one can argue against better management of chronic disease, there's no solid evidence that it will save money or improve care significantly. Last year an article by medical researchers in *Annals of Family Medicine* warned that disease-management programs could end up "as just one more policy failure, undermining primary care and delaying increasingly urgent health care reform."

§ Risk selection. Obama's early campaign boilerplate called for promoting competition among insurers, which McCain supports as well. But Obama is also proposing tighter regulation of insurance companies. His desire to clamp down on insurers gets at the heart of what makes health insurance tick. Companies make money by choosing the healthiest people to insure—"risk selection," as it's known. In large employer groups, the sick and the well balance each other out, so it's easier for people with pre-existing conditions to get insurance from employers. But more and more employers are dropping coverage, thus driving workers into the individual market, where pre-existing conditions do matter and companies sometimes refuse to offer coverage to people even for minor conditions like ear infections. Obama has said he wants to require insurers to accept everybody. That sounds good on the campaign trail and strikes a chord with those who have such conditions. But when push comes to shove, how hard will he press insurance companies, which have contributed handsomely to his campaign? Exactly what will he make companies do—take everyone but allow them to offer skimpier coverage? Refuse to let people change carriers once they get a policy? When all this was being hotly debated in California last year, some insurers were willing to give up some aspects of risk selection as long as everyone was required to get coverage. So a key question is, How is Obama going to get insurers to give up their bread and butter without requiring everyone to have coverage? Companies would want to make sure that losses from sick people could be offset by new profits from those who are healthy. In the California debate, some of the biggest carriers—WellPoint, for example—were planning to fight off any threat to their ability to pick and choose whom they want to insure. It's a good bet that all this will happen again in the legislative process in Washington.

§ Medicare and long-term care. Obama has ducked the real issue here: how to make Medicare sustainable well into the future. It's no secret that the program covering more than 40 million elderly and disabled people will need more money to maintain current benefits. That, of course, could mean increased taxes—or increased privatization, in which beneficiaries are forced to pay more of the cost of care. Like McCain, Obama has hardly touched this explosive issue, aside from saying he wants to allow price negotiation between Medicare and the drug companies, a step experts say will do little to stem the program's growing costs. Nor has Obama said anything about paying for long-term care, another looming budget crisis.

Obama's approach to health reform is incremental, calculated not to arouse opposition from private industry, at least not now. But if he wins in November, with the current system's ailments growing more acute and people continuing to lose coverage with no way to pay for care on their own—and with the single-payer movement gaining more converts—Obama may have to play a bolder hand as president. ■

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Worse Than Guantánamo

What will the United States do with the 20,000 Iraqis it holds in legal limbo?

by DAVID ENDERS

It may seem hard to imagine a place where people incarcerated by the US military have fewer rights than they do in Guantánamo Bay.

Welcome to Iraq.

It is just after 4 AM, and hundreds of Iraqis are lining up to visit their relatives outside Camp Bucca, which in August held about 18,000 detainees. Near the Kuwaiti border, Bucca shimmers in the predawn of the southern Iraqi desert, a beacon of light in a country where electricity is on for no more than twelve hours a day. It is the US military's largest detention center in Iraq. The total number of those officially in US custody in Iraq has fluctuated between a low of 7,200 and more than 26,000 since 2005.

The three hotels in Zubair, one of the closest towns to Bucca, are always full. "We don't have tourism here," says Jabbar Mubarak, the clerk at the Tower of Babil, Zubair's largest hotel. "Everyone who comes to our hotel comes to visit their sons." The lobby swarms with families, some of whom have driven more than ten hours. Despite major offensives in the past year against the Mahdi Army, Iraq's largest Shiite militia, about 80 percent of those in custody here are Sunni and hail from the central and northern parts of the country.

One of the biggest complaints is that the vast majority of detainees have not been charged with any crime. "Why don't the US forces charge him if he has done something? Then at least we would know how long he will be here," said Hadia Khalaf, whose son Qusay was arrested in September 2007. "He was our provider," she said, reflecting the plight of many families who rely on extended family and charity to survive.

Since 2003 approximately 96,000 Iraqis have been officially detained by the US military, with 100,000 more having been temporarily detained but never sent to a theater-level internment facility like Bucca. The other theater-level facility currently open is Camp Cropper at Baghdad Airport, which serves as the system's in- and out-processing center and holds about 3,000 detainees, including roughly 300 juveniles.

The legal basis for detentions stems from a single line of a 2004 UN Security Council resolution, which has been renewed every year since by agreement between the US and Iraqi governments. This resolution, which gives the legal justification for continued US military occupation, allows "internment where this is necessary for imperative reasons of security."

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice are negotiating a status of forces agreement between the two governments that they hope to reach by the end of the year, when the current UN mandate expires. A key issue at stake is detentions, part of a broader area of contention between the two governments over the rights that US troops should have to operate unilaterally in Iraq. The Iraqi government has demanded that the US military no longer be allowed to detain Iraqis without its approval. The State Department and White House have been largely mum about the discussions, while Maliki's office has regularly leaked parts of the agreement and says that the final sticking points are whether US troops will continue to be immune from prosecution under Iraqi law and the extent to which the US military will have to coordinate with and receive approval from the Iraqi government before launching operations.

DAVID ENDERS

Relatives of prisoners outside Camp Bucca, Iraq, summer 2008

On the issue of detentions, Joseph Logan, a researcher for Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa section, thinks an amnesty might be the answer. "If you don't have the evidence to transfer someone to the Iraqi system, it's probably the case that their outright release should be considered," Logan said. "It does seem they've been expediting the process of clearing some people out, and that's praiseworthy. But that doesn't deal with the underlying legal problem—that these people can't challenge their detention and don't have counsel."

What constitutes an "imperative" security threat is left up to those in charge of reviewing detainee cases. "The idea is not to tie the hands of the ground troops," said Capt. Dylan Imperato, a military lawyer at Cropper. Logan thinks this is left purposely vague. "The US is on the one hand claiming broad powers of detention, and at the same time is claiming the conflict is not a war or occupation," he said. "You can't have it

David Enders is a New York–based freelance television and print journalist. Special thanks to the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, which provided a grant to assist his work in Iraq in July and August.

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both ways. If you want these completely unchecked powers of detention, you have to occupy the country again"—that is, revert to the legal status before the 2004 UN resolution.

Detainees receive an initial review of their case before being sent to Cropper, but they are not allowed to attend it. The reviews are conducted by a panel of three US military officers. Detainees are allowed to attend later reviews, but at no point are they given access to a lawyer.

"The level to convict at a criminal court would be a higher level to reach than to determine whether or not they're an imperative security threat," said Imperato. "We don't limit [the review boards] in any major way. We give them broad discretion to make that determination." Imperato said there are many considerations for determining whether a detainee will be held for another six months or recommended for release. "You're not determining guilt or innocence, and you're not strictly looking at the conduct that got them into [detention] in the first place. You're looking at what their plans are when they get out," Imperato said. "Does he have something to go back to? A family, a job? Something that would make him less susceptible to Al Qaeda or any other group?"

Detention can be extended indefinitely. According to a military spokeswoman, about 10 percent of those held have been in detention since 2005 or earlier, 20 percent since 2006, 50 percent since 2007 and 20 percent were detained this year. The numbers are dropping, with an average of forty-five detainees being released and thirty being entered into the system each day.

'I don't think there is a law that covers what we're trying to do—that is, to detain people indefinitely.'
—ret. Adm. John Hutson, military law expert

Detention operations have been a rocky road. Torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib in 2003 and 2004 received the most coverage, but thousands of prisoners living in leaky tents outside the prison's "hard site" complained of lack of medical care, indifferent and at times hostile treatment from guards, inedible food and extreme weather, including flooding. American troops even admitted at the time that they believed more than 80 percent of those detained were innocent of wrongdoing. Recently released Iraqis, as well as Iraqi officials, say that this statistic is probably still true.

Torture also certainly continued past 2004. On a visit to Abu Ghraib in March 2005 (it has since been closed), I saw a detainee who had been strapped to a chair and left in the pouring rain. Only after reading former interrogator Tony Lagouranis's book *Fear Up Harsh* did I learn this was a tactic used to induce hypothermia. At the time the guards told me the prisoner had been restrained because he refused to stop throwing feces at his captors.

The system has come a long way. In general, the released detainees I spoke with said food was good and that treatment was far better than what one could expect in Iraqi government–run prisons. None of the prisoners I interviewed spoke of the vocational programs as highly as US spokespersons did, but they did say that some were available. None complained of abuse during detentions or interrogations once in Cropper or Bucca, though some said they had been beaten and roughly interrogated before being put into the theater-level system.

"The first three days they didn't give me any food," said Samir Mohamed, who was arrested in 2007 while driving between Damascus and Baghdad. He said he was blindfolded for three days while he was interrogated and beaten. "They put cigarettes out on me," he said. One US soldier I spoke to who requested anonymity said the CIA maintained an off-the-books "black site" at Camp Anaconda near Balad as recently as mid-2007. I have not been able to confirm this independently.

Some detainees, including one who believed he had been arrested by US Special Forces, said they waited more than two weeks before being entered into the theater-level system, a violation of the military's rules. And Mohamed, the detainee who said he was beaten, said he went eight months without a hearing, before suddenly being released.

But if the treatment once incarcerated is generally better than in the past, the intelligence that puts Iraqis there does not seem to be. "I was working as a guard at a gas station," said Jassim, who was arrested in August 2007, during the surge in Baghdad. "There were eight of us working as guards, and they lined us up and said, 'We'll take the first four.'" The US military has admitted that the surge led to a surge in detainees as well, as a result of increased raids, which strained an already overcrowded system and elicited fresh reports of arbitrary detentions.

The number of troops and contractors tasked to detention operations has grown considerably and now totals approximately 10,000, according to one spokesman. The increased manpower has allowed cases to be reviewed every six months, and the military says 330 days is the average length of detention. Nonetheless, inmates said the situation inside the prisons, which US officials recently admitted had included incarcerated insurgents running their own courts, can range from boring to dangerous, although the US military claims insurgents are no longer meting out their own justice.

The first time Abu Wissam, 58, was arrested by US troops was in a roundup in December 2003. He was arrested again in September 2007. He has spent most of the latest detention in Bucca's Camp 26, which is known as a *takfiri* camp, since *takfiris*—Sunni Muslim extremists who consider Shiites to be heretics and non-Muslims—have been allowed to run it. "Sometimes they wanted to punish a prisoner," Abu Wissam said. "They would put someone in the camp and tell the *takfiris*, 'This guy worked with the police.' The *takfiris* hate anyone who works with the Iraqi government or the Sahwa or the police."

"The Sahwa people were scared to sleep inside," Abu Wissam said, referring to the movement of former Sunni resistance fighters who have made a marriage of convenience with the US military since late 2006 to battle Al Qaeda. He and other prisoners I interviewed said interrogations mostly focused on general questions. For Abu Wissam it was things such as "did you fight against Israel?" during the 1973 war—apparently considered a mark of suspicion by US interrogators but something that a member of the Iraqi army would have been shot

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for refusing to do. Abu Wissam said he was given a paper to sign, admitting guilt to a list of charges that included murder, attacking US troops, kidnapping and sectarian cleansing. In July the US military admitted that Islamic extremists had been running courts inside Bucca for years and even carrying out killings inside the prisons.

Abu Wissam also said the *takfiri* camp received fewer services than other camps, and that medical treatment could be restricted based on the camp's color-coded designation—red when there were disturbances, orange when things were calmer. "If someone was sick, we had to put his bed next to the door of the camp and leave him there so that the American soldiers would see he was sick and needed medical treatment." Abu Wissam said he complained about the treatment, especially the fact that all prisoners suffered because of the actions of some. "I asked the American officer, 'Why do you treat all of us like *takfiris*?' and he said, 'You killed our friends. You are all *takfiris*.'"

If that exchange suggests collective punishment of prisoners, the review process shouts it. Detainee review hearings at Camp Cropper are held in a sparsely furnished trailer. An Iraqi flag hangs on the wall, no doubt an unintended irony. Prisoners swear on a Koran before three US officers, who read a list of accusations.

In one hearing I observed in early August, the defendant had been rounded up with relatives after a weapons cache was found nearby. The military strongly believed the young man's father was an insurgent, but the officers thought it was more than likely the accused had been picked up simply because he happened to be there. Regardless, it had been enough to hold him for at least four months.

"I just want to go back to school," the young man told the officers when given a chance to speak. "I have missed a year because of this."

"You're still young," one of the officers replied. "You'll have time to catch up."

Before being dismissed, and despite the fact that the three officers said they believed the young man had nothing to do with the weapons found near his house, he was still given a speech that appeared to be standard. "It's your responsibility to report [suspicious activity] to the government or the police," one of the officers told the young man.

Though Captain Imperato insisted the purpose of the hearings is not to determine guilt, at another hearing I attended the officers asked the detainees if they had been responsible for the alleged crimes and, during a third hearing, whether the detainee was a member of the Mahdi Army or knew anyone who was.

"I don't think that there is a law that covers what we're trying to do—that is, to detain people indefinitely. There have been terrorist acts throughout history, so this war is never going to end," said retired Adm. John Hutson, a military law expert. "The 250 guys at Guantánamo can have habeas corpus, but the thousands of detainees elsewhere don't have any rights. I think we have focused like lasers on Guantánamo because it's iconic and it's ninety miles off our shore. But you can't make legal, diplomatic or moral distinctions based on the locale of the detainee. We've worried about Guantánamo, but there are more detainees elsewhere. Whatever rules we come up with have to apply across the board."

But a discussion with retired Col. Janis Karpinski, who was first tasked with detention operations in Iraq, indicates that the system has in many ways stayed mostly the same since 2003. (It was Karpinski, then a brigadier general, who was in charge of the military police brigade that ran Abu Ghraib when the torture photos were released in 2004. She was charged with dereliction of duty and demoted to colonel; Karpinski claims the abuses that took place under her nominal command were carried out under orders from officers reporting to a different chain of command.) The military is still trying to reconcile international law with a conflict that the US government refuses to acknowledge is either a war or an occupation.

"There has never been a situation, a war, nation-building anywhere, where military police units were called to run a country's prison operation," Karpinski said. "Why? Because they call in United Nations forces once an area has been cleared."

Bucca was originally slated to be shut down in late 2003, Karpinski said, before Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller and his staff, who were responsible for setting up Camp X-Ray at Guantánamo, took over from Karpinski. Karpinski said Miller told her he would "Gitmo-ize" the system, after which Abu Ghraib and then Cropper became the main center for interrogations.

"Bucca is holding this massive population of Iraqis who were hauled in and are security detainees that have no intelligence value. When you determine that they have no further intel value, you transfer them to Bucca," Karpinski said.

When Miller visited Iraq in 2003 in anticipation of taking over detention operations, Karpinski asked his top lawyer, Lt. Col. Diane Beaver, what the release policy was at Guantánamo. "I asked her specifically about release procedures for the prisoners at Gitmo," Karpinski said. "Thinking, naïvely, we might be able to learn something from their procedures. Beaver looked at me like I was crazy and arrogantly said, 'Release, ma'am? There is no release plan for our prisoners. Most, if not all of them, will spend every last day of their lives at Gitmo.'"

Outside Bucca, as the sun comes up, Ali, 12, reads a letter he has written to his father. "Dear Daddy, How are you? I hope you are doing well. I miss you so very much and I miss you taking me in your arms. Dear Daddy, we are all doing well, thank God! I pray that God gives me and Mommy and my sister Nour the patience to survive while you are absent. I asked God to help you and all the detainees with you to be released. Dear Daddy, you can rely on God, then on me, to take care of the house and the family. I cry every day, every day thinking of you. I pray for you because you are oppressed. I ask God to release you from your misery, Inshallah!"

Around him, other families, almost all women, wave pictures of the incarcerated. One woman has five sons inside; another has a brother who has been in US prisons since 2004. Another says this is her twelfth visit to Bucca. All say that the trip is a financial strain. One says that without her husband to support her, she has been reduced to begging. Others complain that their children are depressed and failing in school.

"Most of the visits we spend crying," says Shaimaa Jumaa. "It's not just that they keep them locked up and we don't know what they're charged with. It's that they are separated from their families." ■

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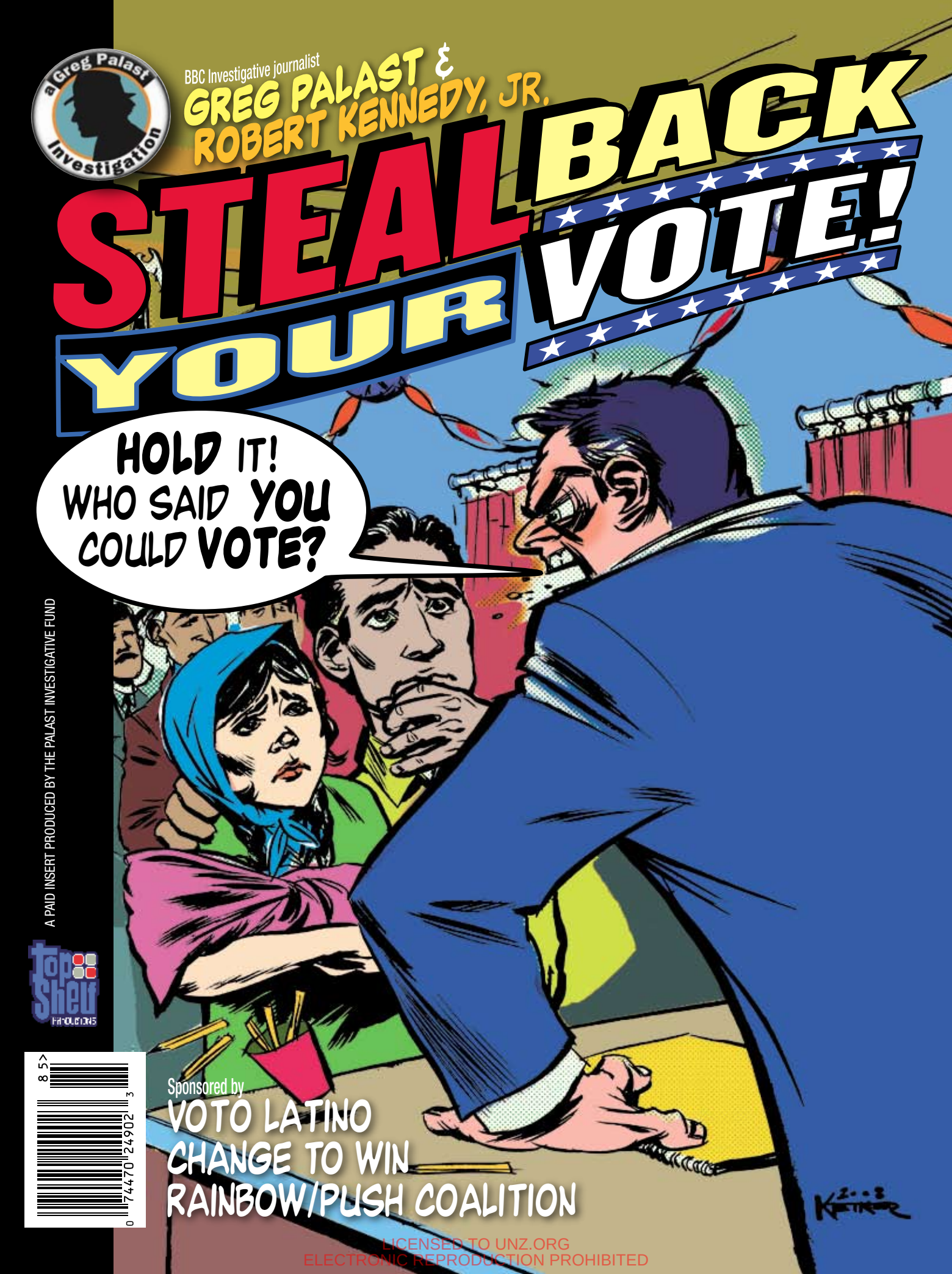

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THIS GUIDE IS NOT ABOUT SAVING DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES. IT IS ABOUT SAVING OUR DEMOCRACY. VOTE-GAMING IS (SIGH) A BI-PARTISAN SPORT.

THE THEFT OF 2008

A WARNING FROM ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.

Bobby Kennedy, Jr. and Greg Palast

Voter suppression is real. It's a crime. And it's happening to YOU.

But there's something that you can do to prevent it. That's what this guide is about. Start with page 19: '7 Easy Steps to Steal Back Your Vote.'

For many years, top investigative reporter Greg Palast and I have been exposing voter suppression.

This is a deliberate strategy to keep minorities from voting, senior citizens from voting, young people from voting in an effort to suppress the vote and maintain their hold on power.

Our concern is not partisan. We need every American to vote: Democrats and Republicans.

You can do all the campaigning you want in a battleground state like Ohio or New Mexico, but if your voters aren't counted, you're going to lose the Presidency–and our democracy.

Pass on this link: www.stealbackyourvote.org. Go to the site. Download copies of this comic book, buy copies in bulk and download STEAL BACK YOUR VOTE: THE MOVIE. Get out the word! There's still time to *steal back your vote!*

"We've marched too long, we've worked too hard, and died too young. Don't let them steal your vote. Read this guide!"

—Rev. Jesse Jackson

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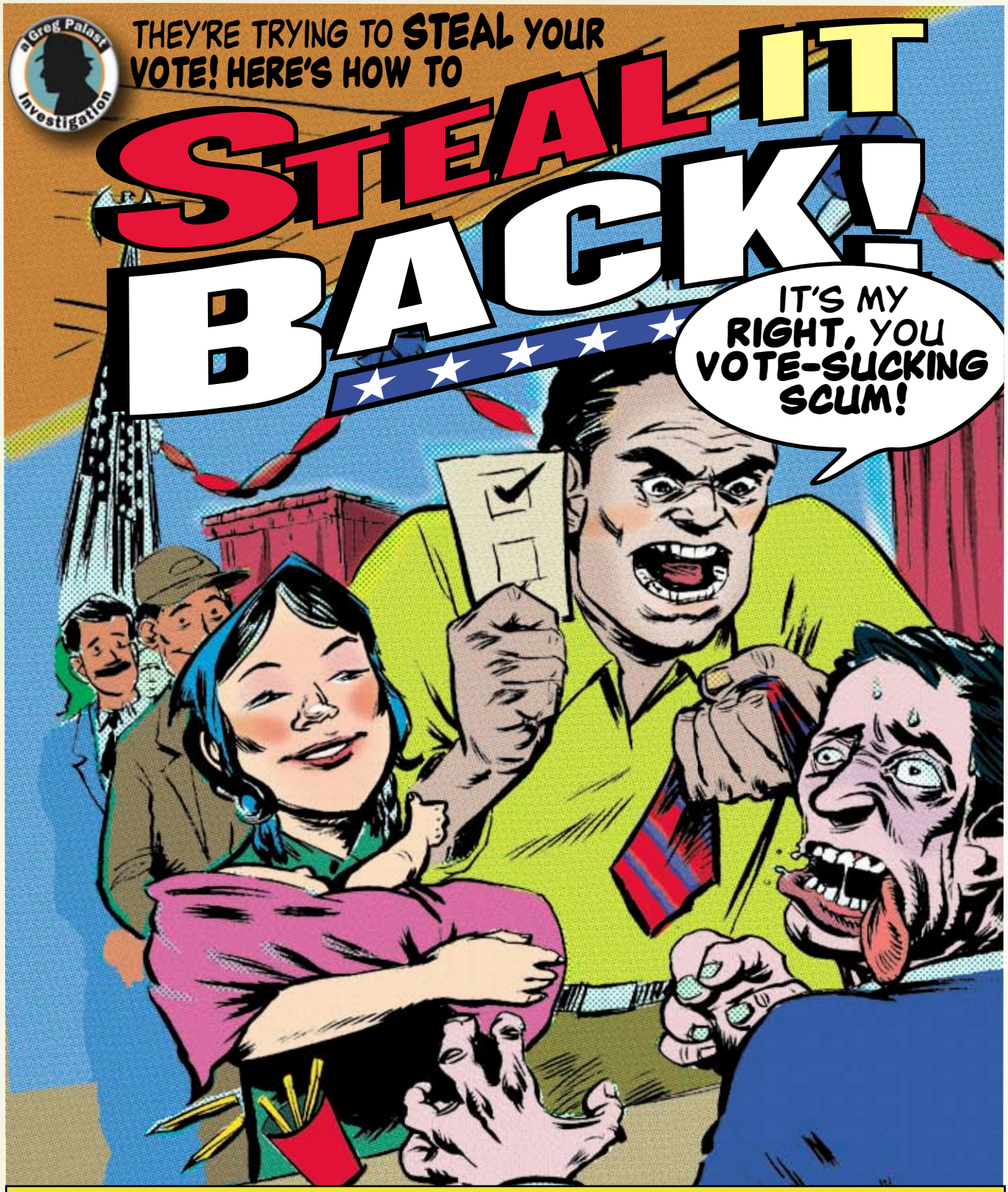
a Greg Palast Investigation
THEY'RE TRYING TO STEAL YOUR VOTE! HERE'S HOW TO
STEAL IT BACK!
IT'S MY RIGHT, YOU VOTE-SUCKING SCUM!

WRITTEN BY GREG PALAST & ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.
COMICS BY TED RALL, LLOYD DANGLE, & LUKAS KETNER
BASED ON THE KENNEDY-PALAST INVESTIGATION FOR Rolling Stone
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NIGHT OF THE LIVING VOTE-SNATCHERS

BY GREG PALAST

In 2002, George W. Bush signed the Help America Vote Act.

When a Bush tells you he's going to "help" you vote–look out!

The result: in the 2004 presidential election, over three million votes—3,006,080—were cast and not counted. Like, what the !@#!?

That's from the official data from an agency created by George Bush called the "Elections Assistance Commission." When a Bush tells you he's going to "assist" our elections... (well, you get it).

Three MILLION ballots disappeared—pfft!

And not just anyone's ballots. U.S. government experts reported, for example, that a black voter's ballot is 900% more likely than a white voter's ballot to get "lost" in the machine. Bush fired the experts.

"INSTEAD OF BEING A VESSEL FOR FACILITATING THE VOTE, [HAVA] BECAME A VESSEL FOR RESTRICTING THE VOTE." -BOBBY KENNEDY

Three million voters went missing in '04—but that ain't nuthin'!

Law professor and voting law expert Robert Kennedy, Jr. warns that it's about to get a whole lot worse. Nasty new spores of the "Help America Vote Act" went into effect since the last election that have turned the process into a vicious game of "Chutes and Ladders," with traps and tricks between you and your vote.

Example: the Republican Secretary of State of Colorado "helped" her state vote by eliminating 19.4% of the voters from the voter rolls.

That's one in five !@#$#@ voters!

Over three million missing ballots–and now the voters themselves are disappearing by the millions. Where the hell did they go?

Read on ...

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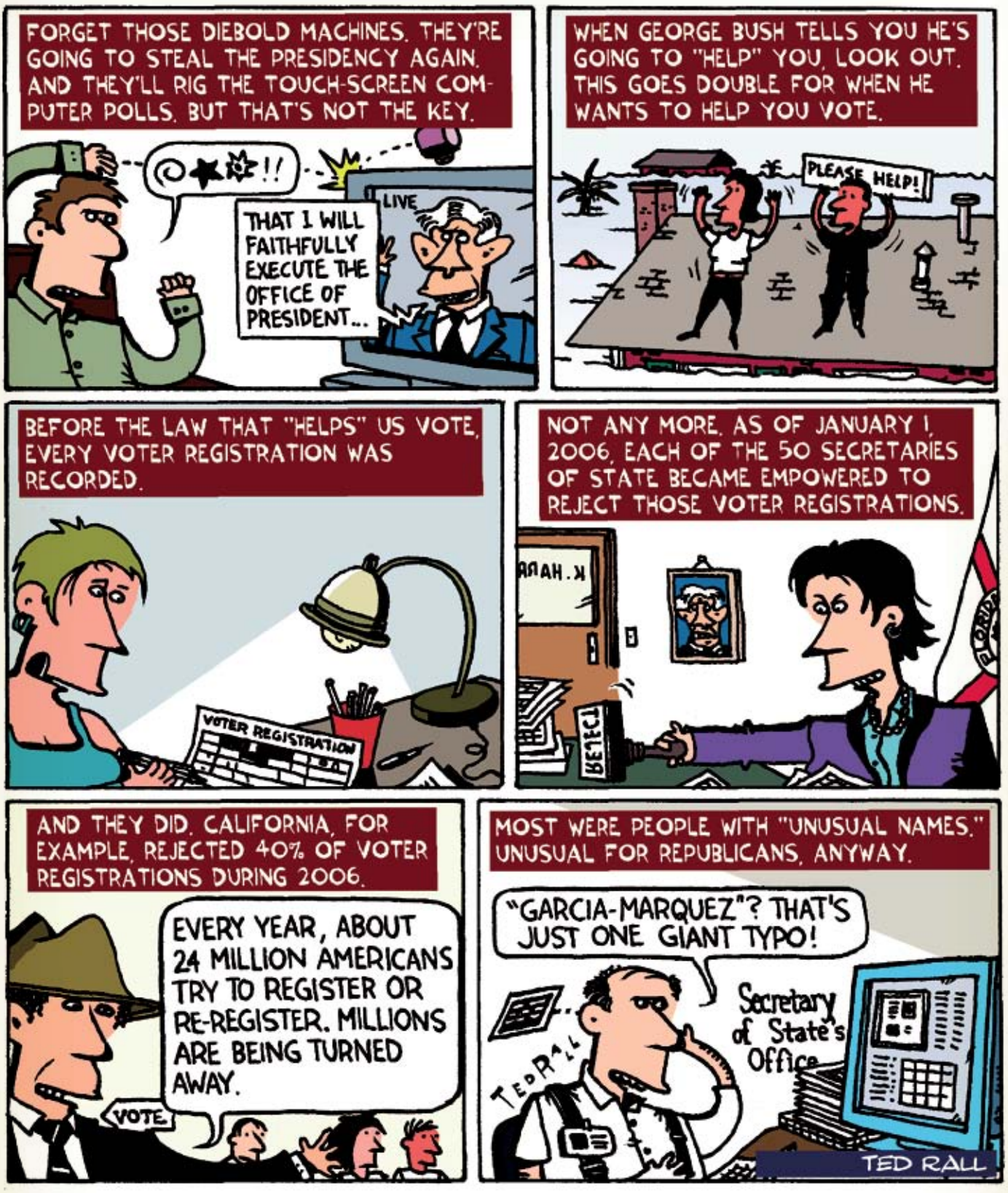
FORGET THOSE DIEBOLD MACHINES. THEY'RE GOING TO STEAL THE PRESIDENCY AGAIN. AND THEY'LL RIG THE TOUCH-SCREEN COMPUTER POLLS. BUT THAT'S NOT THE KEY.
!!
LIVE
THAT I WILL FAITHFULLY EXECUTE THE OFFICE OF PRESIDENT...
WHEN GEORGE BUSH TELLS YOU HE'S GOING TO "HELP" YOU, LOOK OUT. THIS GOES DOUBLE FOR WHEN HE WANTS TO HELP YOU VOTE.
PLEASE HELP!
BEFORE THE LAW THAT "HELPS" US VOTE, EVERY VOTER REGISTRATION WAS RECORDED.
VOTER REGISTRATION
NOT ANY MORE. AS OF JANUARY 1, 2006, EACH OF THE 50 SECRETARIES OF STATE BECAME EMPOWERED TO REJECT THOSE VOTER REGISTRATIONS.
REJECT
AND THEY DID. CALIFORNIA, FOR EXAMPLE, REJECTED 40% OF VOTER REGISTRATIONS DURING 2006.
EVERY YEAR, ABOUT 24 MILLION AMERICANS TRY TO REGISTER OR RE-REGISTER. MILLIONS ARE BEING TURNED AWAY.
VOTE
MOST WERE PEOPLE WITH "UNUSUAL NAMES." UNUSUAL FOR REPUBLICANS, ANYWAY.
"GARCIA-MARQUEZ"? THAT'S JUST ONE GIANT TYPO!
Secretary of State's Office
TED RALL

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SIX WAYS THEY'RE TRYING TO STEAL YOUR VOTE

1 BUST THE LEAGUE

These numbers should scare the hell out of The Rotten Old Order: There are 7 million unregistered Hispanic citizens—and another 17 million unregistered voters between the ages of 18 and 24.

The Establishment's solution: make registering voters a crime.

The Republican Governor and legislature of Florida, for example, made the League of Women Voters and other voter-drive groups subject to a $5000 fine for every voter form they submitted with a picky, accidential error – or if they came in a couple hours past a deadline.

Twenty states (like Florida, thanks to a GOP legislature) have now put weird restrictions on voter drives.

What's their excuse?

"THE FIRINGS OF THE SEVEN U.S. ATTORNEYS CAME DIRECTLY OUT OF THIS CAMPAIGN BY THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT TO TRY TO GIN UP CASES OF VOTER FRAUD IN ORDER TO CREATE IMPEDIMENTS FOR PEOPLE TO VOTE." —BOBBY KENNEDY

"The Democrats have registered five million illegal aliens," the office of Arizona Republican pol Russell Pearce told me.

5,000,000?? Wow! We asked him to name just five – after all, they have to give their name and address to register. He could name … zero.

Despite a huge nationwide manhunt, the Bush Administration could find only five fraudulent voters a year—in the entire USA! Those are the findings of of the top expert in the field, Barnard College professor Lorraine Minnite.

Five ne'er-do-wells per year out of 170 million registered voters. But these goofy rules—and all the tricks that follow—are wiping out 5 million innocent voters.

And that's their plan.

"VOTER FRAUD IS NON-EXISTENT...EVERYBODY WHO HAS EVER STUDIED THIS—NON-PARTISAN, BI-PARTISAN GROUPS—HAVE SAID THAT IT IS SIMPLY NOT A PROBLEM IN THIS COUNTRY."—BOBBY KENNEDY

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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS IS A NICE GROUP OF LADIES WHO EDUCATE VOTERS ABOUT HOW CANDIDATES ACT AND ELECTIONS WORK.
1776
POLITICIANS ARE LIARS. BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER. YOUR VOTE DOESN'T COUNT ANYWAY.*
*ACTUAL TRUTH. NOT ACTUAL VOTER TRAINING.
ENCOURAGING AMERICANS TO REGISTER TO VOTE IS ONE OF THE LEAGUE'S BIGGEST GOALS.
CAN'T YOU JUST SEND ME A LINK?
REGISTER TO VOTE
Sign up! VOTE!
Coldplay
WHICH IS A PROBLEM. MANY NEW VOTERS ARE POOR. AND HAVE DARK SKIN. IN OTHER WORDS, DEMOCRATS.
THOSE HOS ARE WORSE THAN OSAMA!
DON'T DISS MY CAVEBOY—HE HATES DEMOCRACY TOO!
FORTUNATELY, REPUBLICAN (AND YELLOW DOG/CRACKER/WUSSY/ DEMOCRAT) STATE OFFICIALS ARE FIGHTING BACK.
WE MAKE EVERY ITTY-BITTY REGISTRATION ERROR A CRIME. 14 MISTAKES AND THE LEAGUE IS BANKRUPT.*
JEB BUSH
*REALLY!
ULTIMATELY, BLOCKING VOTER REGISTRATION ISN'T ABOUT RACE, OR PARTY. IT'S ABOUT CLASS.
AMONG PEOPLE WHO EARN LESS THAN $15,000 A YEAR, VOTER REGISTRATION IS DOWN TO A RECORD LOW.
MISSION ACCOMPLISHED
MILLIONS OF VOTES WILL DISAPPEAR!

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SIX WAYS THEY'RE TRYING TO STEAL YOUR VOTE

2 THE PURGE'N GENERAL

To those millions of would-be new voters: Good Luck.

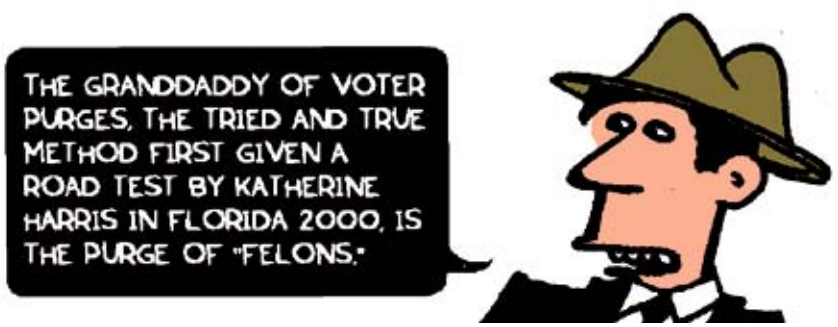
Beginning in 2006, for the first time in U. S. history, federal law allows, even requires, U.S. Secretaries of State to reject first-time registrants where officials decide they cannot match your identity to government records.

The result has been a virtual voter-registry pogrom. States have rejected forms by the hundreds of thousands. In just the first ten weeks under the new rules, a little-noted codicil within the "Help America Vote Act," Republican Secretary of State Bruce McPherson of California successfully blocked 42% of new registrations out-of-hand, 14,629 voters in Los Angeles County alone.

And who were the rejected?

Typically "Latino, Vietnamese, Chinese, Muslim-surnamed citizens," and, in general, the poor, says Debra Bowen, the Democrat who replaced McPherson. The new Secretary of State told us she is hoping, but not certain, she can restore the civil rights of the tens of thousands of rejected voters by November.

"IF THERE WAS A PROBLEM WITH FRAUDULENT VOTING THAT WAS DEMONSTRABLE, IT WOULD BE A DIFFERENT STORY. BUT IN THIS CASE, THERE IS NO PROBLEM - THE PROBLEM DOESN'T EXIST."—BOBBY KENNEDY


THE GRANDDADDY OF VOTER PURGES, THE TRIED AND TRUE METHOD FIRST GIVEN A ROAD TEST BY KATHERINE HARRIS IN FLORIDA 2000, IS THE PURGE OF "FELONS."

Others aren't trying at all.

The GOP Secretary of State of Florida is rejecting 85,000 voters, most of them (you guessed it!) African-American—just in time for the November "election."

And the Secretary of State of Colorado—the one who disappeared one in five of that swing state's voters. George Bush appointed her as Chairman of the US Elections Assistance Commission—to police the whole nation's vote in November. We hear he wanted to call her the "Purge'n General."

"EVERYBODY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO VOTE. AND EVERYBODY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO REGISTER. AND THAT'S NOT HAPPENING IN THIS COUNTRY ANYMORE."—BOBBY KENNEDY

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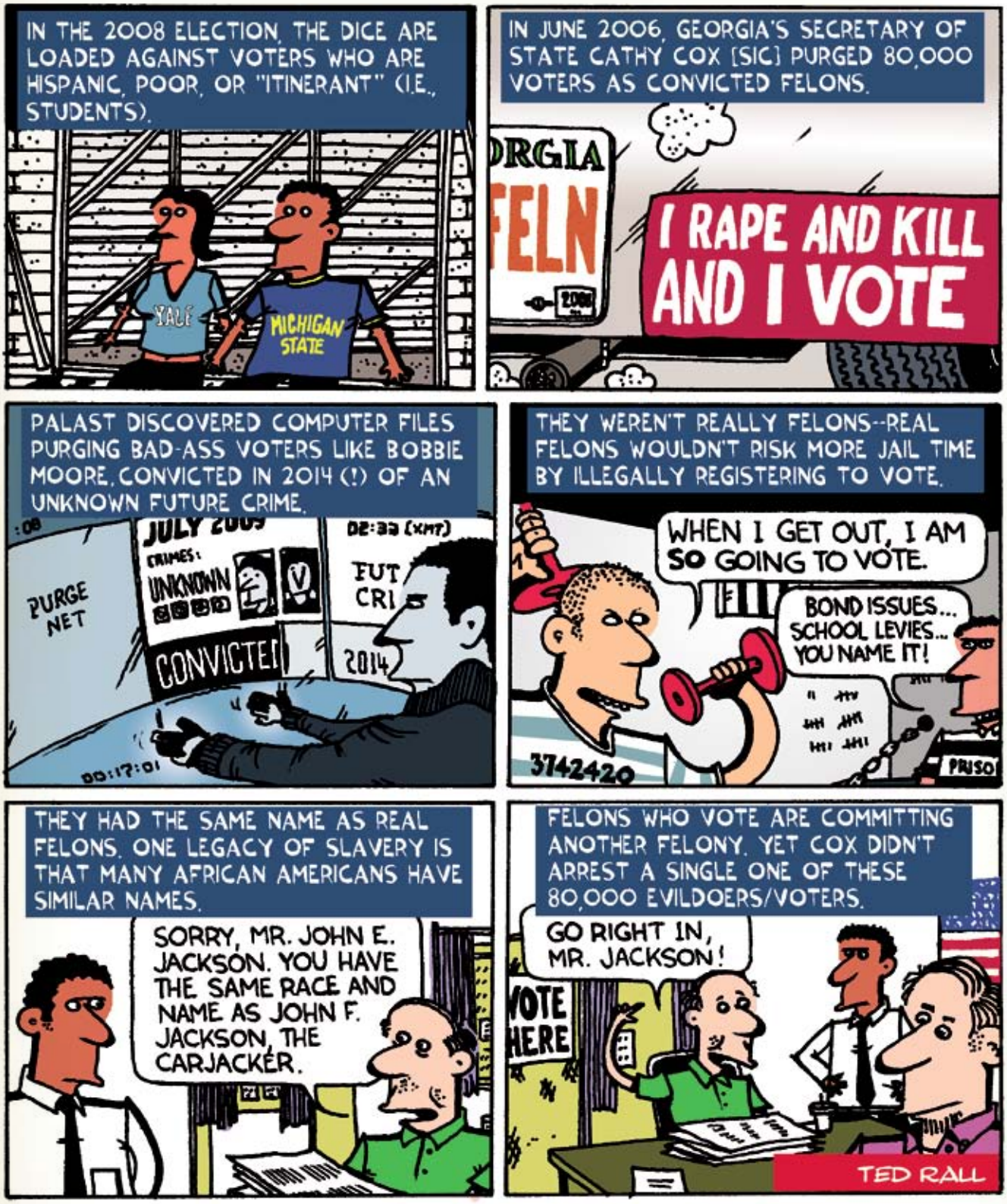
IN THE 2008 ELECTION, THE DICE ARE LOADED AGAINST VOTERS WHO ARE HISPANIC, POOR, OR "ITINERANT" (I.E., STUDENTS).
YALE
MICHIGAN STATE
IN JUNE 2006, GEORGIA'S SECRETARY OF STATE CATHY COX [SIC] PURGED 80,000 VOTERS AS CONVICTED FELONS.
ORGIA
FELN
I RAPE AND KILL AND I VOTE
PALAST DISCOVERED COMPUTER FILES PURGING BAD-ASS VOTERS LIKE BOBBIE MOORE, CONVICTED IN 2014 (!) OF AN UNKNOWN FUTURE CRIME.
PURGE NET
JULY 2009
CRIMES:
UNKNOWN
CONVICTED
02:33 (XMT)
FUT CRI
2014
THEY WEREN'T REALLY FELONS--REAL FELONS WOULDN'T RISK MORE JAIL TIME BY ILLEGALLY REGISTERING TO VOTE.
WHEN I GET OUT, I AM SO GOING TO VOTE.
BOND ISSUES... SCHOOL LEVIES... YOU NAME IT!
3742420
PRISO
THEY HAD THE SAME NAME AS REAL FELONS. ONE LEGACY OF SLAVERY IS THAT MANY AFRICAN AMERICANS HAVE SIMILAR NAMES.
SORRY, MR. JOHN E. JACKSON. YOU HAVE THE SAME RACE AND NAME AS JOHN F. JACKSON, THE CARJACKER.
FELONS WHO VOTE ARE COMMITTING ANOTHER FELONY. YET COX DIDN'T ARREST A SINGLE ONE OF THESE 80,000 EVILDOERS/VOTERS.
GO RIGHT IN, MR. JACKSON!
VOTE HERE
TED RALL

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SIX WAYS THEY'RE TRYING TO STEAL YOUR VOTE

3 SPOILING AMERICA

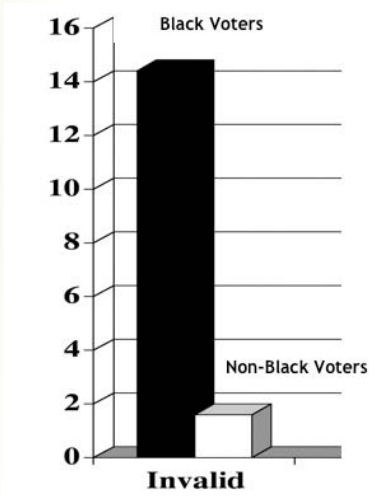
Odd thing about the 207 voters of precinct 999 in Dona Ana County, New Mexico.

Not a single one could choose between George Bush and John Kerry in 2004.

Or at least that's what their ballots said.

The Secretary of State at the time told me, "Some of those people just can't make up their minds." Dirt-poor Dona Ana is 63% Hispanic and the precinct is made up entirely of overseas voters, mostly the Chicano soldiers in Iraq or on duty. The machines say that Hispanic soldiers don't care who becomes their commander-in-chief.

"TOUCH-SCREENS ARE NOTORIOUS. THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO END THE "SPOILAGE" PROBLEM. BUT WE DISCOVERED THAT HISPANICS VOTING ON COMPUTER SCREENS ARE SIX TIMES AS LIKELY TO LOSE THEIR VOTE THAN IF THEY VOTE ON PAPER BALLOTS. SOMETHING IS VERY ROTTEN." —BOBBY KENNEDY



Black: 14.4% Cast not counted
Non-Black: 1.6% Cast not counted

Or maybe, the machines failed to register their votes.

Few Americans realize that in 2004, 1,389,231 ballots were never counted because they were "spoiled." How do ballots spoil? They get left out of the 'fridge? No, they're supposedly unreadable, blank, or just somehow lost in the machines.

Here's an unfun fact: not everyone's vote spoils the same.

The U.S. Civil Rights Commission found that the chances of an African-American voter losing their vote is 900% higher than a white voter. Hispanic votes vanished at a rate 500% higher than Anglo votes.

Something's rotten.

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DIG THESE NUMBERS. IN '04 BUSH WON NEW MEXICO BY JUST 5,988 VOTES. YET OVER 21,000 WERE BLANK—
BLANK?!!
I HUNTED DOWN THE THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON HER CELL WHILE SHE WAS TOOLING TO CHI-CHI SANTA FE. TOLD ME INDIANS ARE INDECISIVE.
THEY CAN'T PICK A PRESIDENT.
I ASKED THE TAOS WAR CHIEF.
YOU GUYS CAN'T MAKE UP YOUR MINDS?
WE TRUSTED THEM. WE THOUGHT THEY KNEW ABOUT THESE SOPHISTICATED THINGS.
THEM ARE THE LOCAL WHITE POLITICIANS WHO DUMPED THE POX-INFESTED MACHINES. THE CHIEF WAS RESIGNED TO IT.
NOTHING NEW ON THE REZ.
2 MILLION BLANK BALLOTS IN THE USA—
WE"RE ALL ON THE REZ.

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SIX WAYS THEY'RE TRYING TO STEAL YOUR VOTE

4 PROVISIONAL DEMOCRACY

"THE R.N.C. SENDS A LETTER TO THE VOTER AT THE NAVAL AIR STATION, AND IF THIS VOTER HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN OR EUROPE, THEN THE LETTER WILL COME BACK TO THE SENDER, WHICH IS THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE."

—BOBBY KENNEDY

Uh-oh.

Three million voters showed up at the polls on Election Day 2004 and, instead of getting real ballots, were handed something called a "provisional" ballot, a new creature created by the Help America Vote Act. And guess what? About a third—one million votes—were then thrown away, rejected. In Ohio, the pile in the dumpster would have changed the name of the guy in the White House.

It's about to happen again. Big time. In the caucus primary of 2008 in New Mexico, one in nine Democrats were handed these bogus bouncing ballots. How come so many? There's a big old challenge machine operation lying in wait to get you.

It started with a man named Tim Griffin, Karl Rove's protégé, who directed a scheme called "caging." But we caught him. Tim's not the sharpest knife in the drawer, so he addressed his confidential emails to GeorgeWBush.org instead of GeorgeWBush.com. The .org site is owned by John Wooden, a friend of ours, who sent it right to us at BBC-TV. Oops!

In one New Mexico pueblo, hundreds of Native Americans were forced to vote provisionally—but local politicians didn't give them official envelopes. Then these same politicians threw the votes away because they didn't have official envelopes.

The politicians, by the way, were all, uh, Democrats.

"WHEN THIS FELLOW SHOWS UP TO VOTE, THEY'LL SAY: "YOU DON'T LIVE AT THIS ADDRESS ANYMORE, WE'RE CHALLENGING YOUR VOTE. WE CAN'T GIVE YOU A REAL BALLOT, WE'LL INSTEAD GIVE YOU A PROVISIONAL BALLOT. BUT OF COURSE, PROVISIONAL BALLOTS HAVE TURNED OUT TO BE JUST A PLACEBO, THROWN AWAY IN HALF THE CASES." —BOBBY KENNEDY

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CLEVELAND, OHIO
LAST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, 3 MILLION VOTERS WERE HANDED, INSTEAD OF A REAL BALLOT, A WEIRD BALONEY BALLOT.
IT WAS CREATED BY A REPUBLICAN CONGRESS–ESPECIALLY FOR VOTERS OF THE WRONG COLOR (BLACK AND BLUE), PART OF THEIR HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT. WHEN GEORGE BUSH WANTS TO "HELP" YOU VOTE, LOOK OUT.
EVERY TIME A PIMPLY POLITICO WITH A BLACKBERRY CHALLENGED A VOTER IN A BLACK PRECINCT, THE CITIZEN GOT A "PROVISIONAL" BALLOT, FILLED IT OUT –THEN IT WAS TOSSED IN THE GARBAGE.
1.1 MILLION VOTES IN THE TRASH.
OUR DEMOCRACY"S IN A DUMPSTER IN CLEVELAND.

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SIX WAYS THEY'RE TRYING TO STEAL YOUR VOTE

5 VOTES GONE POSTAL

"We are…beginning to look like we have elections like those run in countries where the guys in charge are, you know, colonels in mirrored glasses."—Karl Rove

Was Karl warning us or boasting?

You're a new voter in Idaho and mail in your absentee ballot. Save the stamp and throw it away—because elections officials will: you have to personally appear with your ID.

Idaho isn't alone with that new voter Block-the-Vote trick. Missouri—did you notarize your ballot? In Kentucky, did you sign it twice? In Colorado, did you use the official envelope?

With partisan officials ready to rip up your ballot over signatures, postage sums, envelope sizes, challenging a circle versus 'X' and other picky-picky gotcha stuff, mailing in your ballot today is a kind of electoral Russian Roulette.

About one in ten absentee ballots get chucked in the dumpster. You're still mailing in your ballot??? Like, hello!

"WE LIVE IN A DEMOCRACY. WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE AN EXEMPLARY NATION. WE'RE SPENDING THREE TRILLION DOLLARS TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY HAVE DEMOCRACY IN IRAQ…BUT WE DON'T EVEN HAVE DEMOCRACY IN OHIO."—BOBBY KENNEDY

PACIFICA AND FLASHPOINTS • KPFT'S MARK BABAWI • THE LOUIE FREE SHOW • GUERRILLA NEWS NETWORK • VOXPOP • COUNT THE BLACK VOTE • TREVOR LYMAN • BREAK THE MATRIX • VOTERMARCH • ALTERNATIVE TENTACLES • AMERICAN

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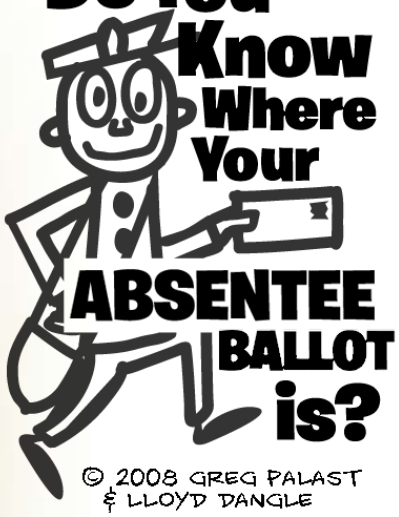
Computer-wary voters went postal in 2004: In some states, mail-in ballot requests were up 500%. The chance that all those votes--over 19 million--were counted? **ZILCH!**

IT'S 10 PM: Do You Know Where Your ABSENTEE BALLOT is?



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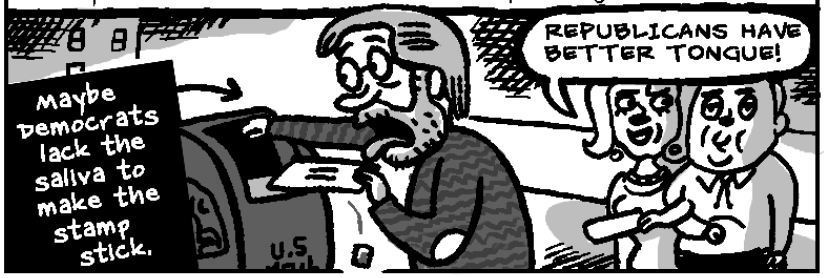
In the 2004 Florida primaries, Palm Beach Elections Supervisor Theresa LePore counted 37,839 absentee votes. But days before, her office told journalist Greg Palast, that only 29,000 ballots had been received! AMAZING!

If a few thousand votes had gone missing, instead of more miraculously appearing, there'd be almost no way to figure it out. LePore was made to do a recount...and acknowledge 6000 phonies.

Meanwhile, in Arapahoe County, Colorado, three times more absentee ballots mailed to Democrats "failed to return" as compared to Republicans-- A fact that couldn't be accounted for by the number of Dems versus Reps using them.

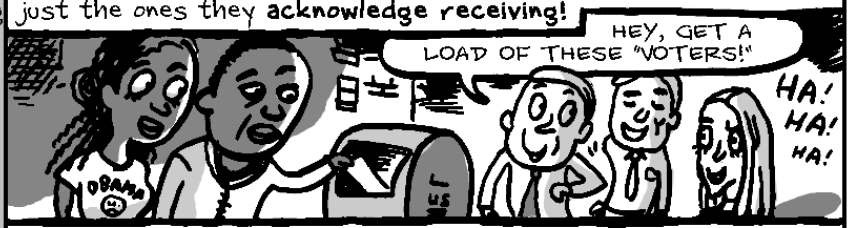


Millions of voters, not trusting elections officials to operate voting machines without tampering, mailed in their ballots to these same officials on the faith that they would be tallied. Who knew that their signature, envelope, address, or pencil lead thickness could be reason enough for their votes to be trashed?

In San Diego, a Democratic write-in candidate for mayor lost by 2,108 votes after 5,551 absentee ballots with her name clearly written in were tossed. The reason? While the voters wrote in her name, they failed to also check the box next to it.

Precinct-by-precinct arithmetic disclosed that absentee voters in strong Kerry precincts were 265% more likely to have their votes tossed than those in Bush precincts. Behind this statistic is (Surprise!) **Jim Crow Racism.** Black voters' absentee ballots were rejected at a rate 316% higher than whites.'

In the US in 2004, from official reports, half a million (526,426) absentee ballots were received but not counted--and those are just the ones they **acknowledge receiving!**



Democrats, who once excelled at the art of counting Chicago's absentees, even dead ones, are way behind in this new game. It makes you wonder, do they want to win-- or are they just mailing it in?

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SIX WAYS THEY'RE TRYING TO STEAL YOUR VOTE

6 NUNS ON THE RUN

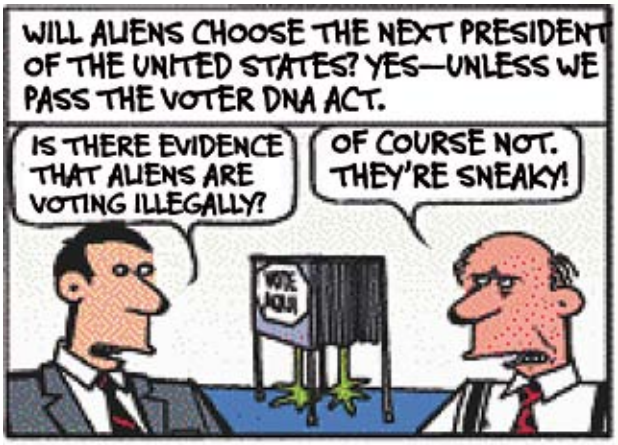
So, these ten nuns walk into a polling station and... Oh, you've heard that one?

What you didn't hear is that, besides the Sisters of the Holy Cross who lost their vote because their drivers licenses expired, 144,896 other legal voters were told to scram in this year's primary —all caught attempting to vote without a license. The rejected were, disproportionately, African-American, according to data from the University of Washington.

Apparently, the idea for this racially rancid rule came to Karl Rove while he was buying his Pampers: "If I try to cash a check at a grocery store, I have to show an ID. Why not for voting?"

The answer, Karl, is that for a century, Indiana folks have voted without photo ID with not a single known case of voter identity theft.

It's true the law nabbed Shirley Preiss, a 98-year-old Democrat whose driver's license expired. Drop that ballot, Shirl, and no one gets hurt.


WILL ALIENS CHOOSE THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES? YES—UNLESS WE PASS THE VOTER DNA ACT.
IS THERE EVIDENCE THAT ALIENS ARE VOTING ILLEGALLY?
OF COURSE NOT. THEY'RE SNEAKY!

Santiago Juarez sees some truth in Rove's remarks. We met with Santiago in Espanola, New Mexico, where he was running a registration drive among low-riders, the young Mexican-Americans who cruise the street in hopping, bopping, neon-outlined Chevys. He says, "The same poverty and racism that keeps these kids from getting credit cards keeps them from getting ID." A young Mexicana he escorted to the polls was turned away from her first-ever attempt to vote for failure to produce an ID to the white pollworker's satisfaction, despite Santiago's protest.

"She said, well, something you can't print, and refused to try again. She said, 'They don't want me to vote, anyway.'"

"ONE OUT OF EVERY TEN AMERICANS DON'T HAVE A GOVERNMENT-ISSUED ID BECAUSE THEY DON'T TRAVEL ABROAD, SO THEY DON'T HAVE PASSPORTS, AND THEY DON'T DRIVE A CAR SO THEY DON'T HAVE DRIVERS LICENSES. THE NUMBER RISES TO ONE IN FIVE WHEN YOU'RE DEALING WITH THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY. AND INDEED, FOR THOSE PEOPLE TO GET A GOVERNMENT-ISSUED ID—IT'S AN OBSTACLE."—BOBBY KENNEDY

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THE NEWEST SCAM TO STEAL YOUR VOTE
INDIANA
PALAST G.
HAIR
HGT.
EYE
DONOR
VOTER I.D.
On May 6, 2008, 10 elderly sisters of the cloth were denied the right to vote in Indiana because they had the wrong kind of I.D....
NICE TRY, HONEY! IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'D BETTER RETURN THAT GET-UP TO THE COSTUME STORE!
HEH! HEH!
Angela H., Allyson M., and who knows how many other college students had their votes denied because their student I.D.'s didn't show their dorm room addresses...
I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M BEING CARDED!
THIS ISN'T EVEN MY FAKE I.D.!
What the HELL is going on? Nothing, says Secretary of State Todd Rokita:
INDIANA'S VOTER I.D. LAW APPLIES (FAIRLY) TO EVERYONE.
REALLY? Journalist, Greg Palast, wondered if it applied the same if you happened to be voting while black...
So Palast crunched the numbers: African-Americans make up 9% of Indiana's electorate (that comes to approx. 400,000 voters).
According to a Univ. of Washington study, 28% of those don't carry the I.D. that's required.
91% HONKY
9% BLACK
INDIANA
In a state that Hillary won by only 14,000 votes, 100,000 African-Americans, the young, the old, and those who live in convents – that adds up to a lot of missing I.D. cards – and STOLEN VOTES!
If that's not enough, Georgia, Louisiana, Missouri, and Arizona have jumped on the voter I.D. bandwagon, supposedly to stop "vote fraud."
GET OUT!
That's what cost U.S. Attorneys their jobs – they discovered that vote fraud only existed in Karl Rove's imagination.
Martin Luther King walked 56 miles from Selma to Montgomery for the right to vote. In the Supreme Court, Justice Scalia remarked that the burden of a 17-mile walk to the voter I.D. office was no different for a 98-year-old nun than for a chauffer-driven Republican.
THOSE LIKELY DEMOCRATIC VOTERS COULD USE THE EXERCISE!
So, did Indiana go to all the trouble to fix a primary for Hillary? No. But as a dry run, it proved that voter I.D. should work just as planned in November.
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A lot of Europeans wonder: "Why are Americans so crazy, they keep re-electing this guy?" Well, the answer is: we don't! They keep stealing these elections! And they're all set up to steal it again! —Bobby Kennedy, Jr.

YOU GOT THE COMIC! NOW DOWNLOAD THE FILM!

STEAL BACK YOUR VOTE: THE MOVIE

Based on Greg Palast's investigations for BBC TV. *"America's best investigative reporter—and the funniest,"* says Randi Rhodes. On the hunt for vote bandits—featuring Bobby Kennedy Jr., with a cameo by Karl Rove.

"They thought I was just going to roll over —what they tried to do is just wrong and illegal." —US Prosecutor David Iglesias (fired)

"TURN OFF THAT CAMERA!" —Katherine Harris' elections chief.

DONATE A BUCK! GET THE MOVIE!

WWW.STEALBACKYOURVOTE.ORG/FILM

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STEAL BACK YOUR VOTE IN 7 EASY STEPS

JOIN THE INSURGENCY
VISIT:
StealBackYourVote.org

1 DON'T DON'T DON'T MAIL IN YOUR BALLOT

For those of you who mailed in your ballot, please tell me, what happened to it? You don't know, do you? I can tell you that officially, three-fourths of a million absentee ballots were never counted last time, on the weakest of technical excuses. And you won't even know it. Furthermore, tens of thousands of ballots are not mailed out to voters in time to return them—in which case you're out of luck. In most states, new voters must now include a photocopy of their ID. Which is, like, nuts. Every time I hear of a voter going "absentee" to avoid computer screens, I want to "go postal" myself.

2 VOTE EARLY...VERY EARLY

Every state now lets voters cast ballots in designated polling stations and at county offices in the weeks before Election Day. Do it. Don't wait until Election Day to find out you have the wrong ID, your registration's "inactive," or you're on a challenge list. By Election Day, there's little to do but hold up the line.

3 REGISTER AND REGISTER AND REGISTER

Think you're registered to vote? Think again. With all this purg'n going on, you could be x'd out and you won't know it. Check online at www.votersunite.org/info/RegInfo.asp. Then register your girlfriend, your wife, your mailman and your mommy. Contact the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, Rock the Vote, and your local party organization, and commit to a couple of days of door-to-door registration, especially in minority neighborhoods or at social service agency offices. And if you've served the time, you can sign: in almost every state, ex-cons can vote.

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4 VOTE UNCONDITIONALLY, NOT PROVISIONALLY

In 2008, they'll be handing out provisional ballots like candy, especially to Hispanic voters. If your right to vote is challenged, don't accept a provisional ballot that will likely not get counted no matter what the sweet little lady at the table tells you. She won't decide; partisan sharks will. Demand adjudication from poll judges on the spot; demand a call to the supervisor of elections; or return with acceptable ID if possible. And be a champ: defend the rights of others.

If you've taken Step 1 above and voted early, you have Election Day free to be a poll watcher. Run into trouble—you've been caged or purged or challenged—call **Election Protection at 1-(866) OUR-VOTE.** Then challenge the challengers, the weird guys with Blackberrys containing lists of "suspect" voters. Be firm, but no biting.

5 OCCUPY OHIO, INVADE NEVADA

The revolution will not be podcast. Let go of that mouse, get out of your PJs and take the resistance door-to-door—to register the vote, to canvass the voters, to get out the vote. Donate time to your union (if you're not in a union, why not?) or to the troublemakers I've already listed here and on our site. This may seem a stupendously unoriginal suggestion, but I know of no other method more effective for confronting the armed and dangerous junta that has seized the White House.

6 DATE A VOTER

Voting, like bowling and love, should never be done alone. As our sponsor, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, says, make a date to 'Arrive with Five.' And keep this comic book in your holster - with our 800 numbers and your photo ID in your hand. And Bobby, make sure your ID says, "Robert Kennedy JUNIOR" or your vote is toast.

7 MAKE THE DEMOCRACY DEMAND: NO VOTE LEFT BEHIND!

I have this crazy fantasy in my head. In it, an election is stolen and the guy who's wrongly declared the loser stands up in front of the White House and says three magic words: "Count the votes." You can have all the paper ballots in the world, but if you don't demand to look at them, publicly, in a recount, you might as well mark them with invisible ink.

Democracy requires vigilance The Day After. That's when you check in at www.stealbackyourvote.org one more time.

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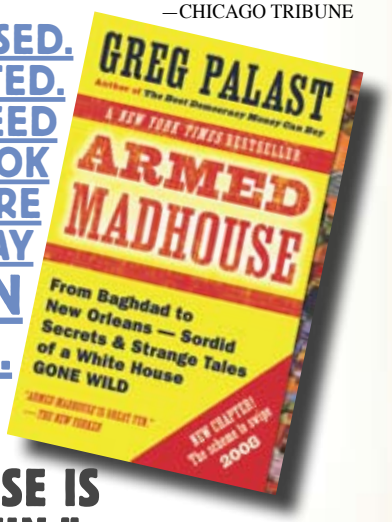
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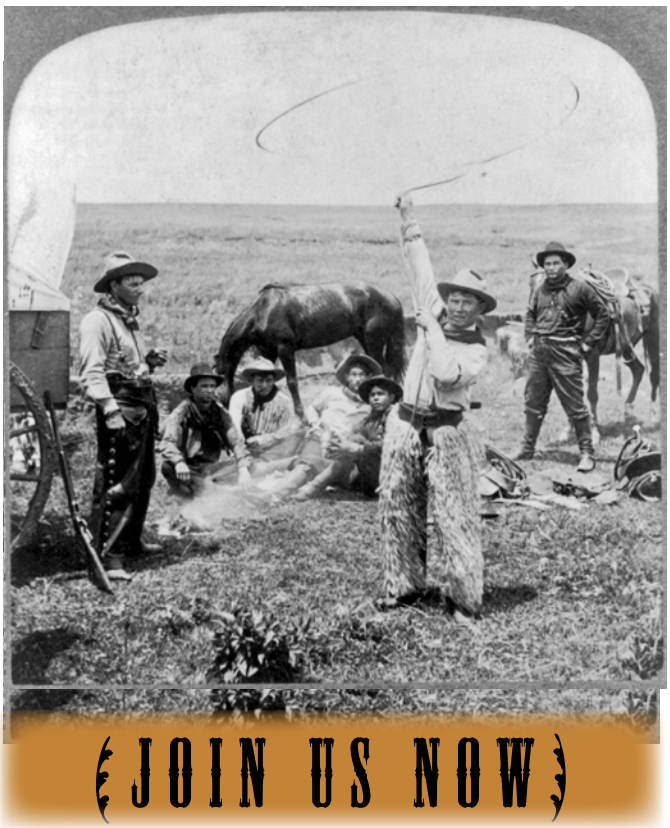

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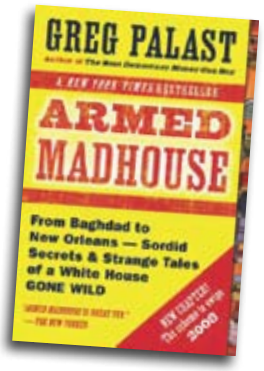

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Preaching to the Choir

Led by Obama, Democrats are making a bid for evangelical voters. Lost cause or holy grail?

by SARAH POSNER

When Barack Obama proclaimed that "we worship an awesome God in the blue states" at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, he sent a tingle through many young evangelical Democrats. The party was set to nominate John Kerry, considered by many evangelical activists to be religiously tone-deaf, but these Democratic faithful were already eyeing Obama as the un-Kerry, an unabashed believer ready to praise God in public.

Two years later, Obama further energized young Christian activists with an electrifying speech at the Call to Renewal Conference, hosted by the evangelical antipoverty group Sojourners. These evangelicals had trained their sights on placing "life" issues beyond abortion on the religious agenda—ending the war, torture, climate change and global poverty. Mara Vanderslice, religious outreach director for the Kerry campaign who now runs the Matthew 25 Network, a Christian political action committee that supports Obama, said the speech marked "a turning point" for the Democrats. No more ceding religion to the Christian right; no more limiting the "values" issues to gay marriage and abortion.

By the time Obama accepted his party's presidential nomination, many more pieces of a Democratic religious revival had been put in place. The DNC launched a Faith in Action initiative to organize faith communities around the party's values. It appointed Leah Daughtry, a faith-healing Pentecostal minister, to chair the party's 2008 convention, which for the first time kicked off with an Interfaith Gathering and included meetings of a newly formed Faith Caucus. The Obama campaign started a Religious Affairs Department, began conference-call prayers and campaign dispatches on faith and values, and launched local American Values Forums, where campaign surrogates discussed how Obama's faith shapes his commitment to public service. In mid-August, Obama appeared with John McCain at megapastor Rick Warren's Saddleback Church to answer questions about his policies and his religious beliefs. And in late September, Obama kicked off a Faith, Family and Values tour, through which prominent antichoice evangelical and Catholic endorsers traveled the country to make the case for Obama.

The Democrats, it seems, have finally gotten religion. But at what cost?

To be sure, Obama and the Democratic Party are not out to mimic the cynical alliance between the GOP and the religious right, either in tone or in strategy. Their outreach does not hinge on a theocratic fantasy that would replace the Constitution with the Bible but on portraying Obama's progressive values on healthcare, the economy and the environment as rooted in his strong faith. Joshua DuBois, the campaign's national director for religious affairs, says, "We try to strike an appropriate balance between acknowledging religious institutions and doing what has too often been done by others in the past: going to churches and asking for a church directory" to cull for voters. Instead, through the American Values Forums, the campaign, says DuBois, is "building a network of lay people of faith who can reach out to their communities and bring more people into the campaign."

These outreach efforts may counter the right-wing myth that Democrats are anti-religion, at least among progressively inclined believers, but it's unclear whether they will shift enough religious voters to alter the electoral map. Indeed, most polls indicate that Obama's God-talk has not helped him win over a greater share of white evangelicals and white Catholics than Kerry garnered in 2004. Fewer evangelicals are registered Republicans than in 2004, but the movement has been to the independent column, not to Democratic Party affiliation.

According to two seminal surveys of religion and politics—the Pew Forum's Religious Landscape Survey and Calvin College's National Survey on Religion and Public Life—roughly one-quarter of the adult white population is evangelical. Half of them are conservative politically, tend to be fundamentalist about their religion and are aligned with the religious right; about a third are more moderate and independent politically and tend to take a less literalist approach to the Bible; and about one-fifth are progressive politically and see religion through a more modern lens. In 2000 George W. Bush got 68 percent of the white evangelical vote; in 2004 he got 78 percent.

Over the summer, polls showed a higher number of evangelicals were "persuadable" this year than in 2004. But since that time, the number of undecided evangelicals declined substantially, to 8 percent, even before McCain tapped religious-right darling Sarah Palin as his running mate. According to John Green, senior fellow at the Pew Forum, "This is because they have been moving into the McCain column. However, many evangelicals who say they will vote for McCain lack enthusiasm for him—so in this sense they are still 'persuadable.'"

The selection of Palin appears to have helped solidify this vote for McCain, but still, even a modest conversion of the remaining persuadable evangelicals to the Democratic column could make a crucial difference. "Obama may not have the same opportunity to woo evangelical voters as he did previously," Green says. "Still, if Obama were to attract a substantial portion of these McCain voters, it would be very positive for his campaign."

In several important swing states, the number of white evangelicals matches or exceeds the proportion of evangelicals nationwide, including Ohio (26 percent), Michigan (26 percent), Colorado (23 percent), Virginia (31 percent), Florida (25 per-

Sarah Posner writes "The FundamentaList," a weekly roundup of news from the religious right, for The American Prospect Online *and is the author* God's Profits *(PoliPoint).*

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cent) and New Mexico (25 percent). The evangelicals in these states tend to be less conservative than their Bible Belt brethren, and the more moderate ones are considered to be up for grabs. Catholics, another crucial swing group, make up about a quarter to a third of the population in Pennsylvania, Florida and Ohio.

Obama's Faith, Family and Values tour takes aim at these battleground states, with popular evangelical author Donald Miller, former Congressman Tim Roemer and former Reagan official Doug Kmiec (both antichoice Catholics) stumping under the slogan "Vote ALL Our Values." But even in the midst of the financial crisis, which created an opening for religiously informed discussions about economic justice, the Faith tour has struggled at times. A pre-launch event held by Shaun Casey, Obama's evangelical outreach coordinator, in the conservative stronghold of southwest Virginia, home to the late Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, drew just twenty-five people.

Peeling away moderate and conservative evangelicals with a message of public service and social justice may prove to be a challenge, even with evangelical discontent with the GOP. But Robert Jones, author of the new book *Progressive and Religious*, maintains that "the real numbers are yet to be seen…there are still double-digit uncommitted voters. Those folks who aren't knee-jerk partisan voters will wait it out." Jones admitted that in 2006 "most of those evangelicals came home to the Republican Party," but he is not so sure this year. "The story will be where the uncommitted evangelicals break…I think we will see numbers breaking in a way that will surprise people."

Creating such a surprise has been the goal of Jones and some of the clients of his consulting firm, Public Religion Research, which has worked with new organizations in Washington to promote a broader religious agenda. One of his clients, Faith in Public Life (FPL), a nonprofit incubated at the Center for American Progress after the 2004 election, was at the forefront of promoting a more robust discussion of faith in this year's presidential campaign. Throughout the season, FPL has advanced the story line that less conservative religious voters are not only keen on having their voices heard in the public square but also on hearing about how presidential candidates' values guide their policy decisions. FPL organized the Compassion Forum at Messiah College in April, at which Obama and Hillary Clinton were put to the test of establishing their religious credentials, and pressed for the one at Warren's Saddleback Church.

Another one of Jones's clients, the centrist think tank Third Way, partnered with prominent evangelicals to produce an October 2007 white paper, "Come Let Us Reason Together," on how progressives and evangelicals could find common ground on divisive culture-war issues like abortion and gay rights. (Jones was a co-author.) FPL played a key role in promoting its signers, evangelical centrists like David Gushee, president of Evangelicals for Human Rights and professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University; Jim Wallis, president of Sojourners, who moderated two of the four Faith Caucus panels at the DNC; and Joel Hunter, the Florida mega-church pastor and registered Republican who gave the benediction on the closing day of the DNC. All three have been promoting evangelical interests in non-culture-war issues, with Gushee focused on environmental issues and ending torture, Wallis emphasizing fighting poverty and Hunter addressing environmental issues.

"Come Let Us Reason Together" focuses on an issue that is anathema to the religious right, and may also spoil Democratic chances to peel off moderate evangelicals and Catholics—abortion. The white paper stresses the value of abortion reduction, and while no reproductive rights groups were openly critical of it, none endorsed it. Wallis and Hunter lauded the adoption of the abortion reduction plank in the Democratic platform, hailing language that they said was included after religious leaders' input. (Reproductive rights advocates also declared victory, claiming the strongest prochoice plank in party history.) In his acceptance speech, Obama tried to straddle the line between his prochoice base and the religious abortion-reduction advocates: "We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country."

Obama's record on reproductive rights will likely drive away staunchly conservative antichoicers, but his rhetorical shift away from reproductive rights and toward abortion reduction was clearly aimed at religious moderates and evangelicals. Still, some abortion-reduction proponents were not satisfied. Steven Waldman, editor of the religion website Beliefnet, castigated the party at a convention panel. Religious progressives who have energized the party should also be "challenging the party," he tsk-tsked. "Catholics and evangelicals agree with Barack Obama on 80 percent of issues, but the thing that's holding them up is they think he's an extremist on abortion." Although the abortion-reduction proponents are critical of the Republicans' hardline antiabortion plank, they maintain that Obama has not gone far enough. Gushee said, "I'm not convinced Obama is going to spend energy and capital" on abortion reduction. "You don't have credibility with centrist evangelicals," Gushee adds, "if you don't spend some capital on it. It's really hard to explain how deep the sense of revulsion and sorrow is in mainstream evangelical communities about abortion."

But even if Obama's courtship of evangelicals and Catholics succeeds in smoothing over this sticking point, is it a wise strategy? By emphasizing their religious credentials, Democrats are implicitly buying into the right's phony charge that Democrats hate religion (see Ronald Aronson, "All Ye Unfaithful," page 52) without necessarily shifting the terms of what it means to be religious. The hazard of this approach was highlighted by the question at the Saddleback forum that caused Obama the most trouble: whether life begins at conception, a question framed by the culture-war rhetoric Warren has claimed to eschew. After the forum, Warren told the *Wall Street Journal* that there was no philosophical or theological difference between him and James Dobson, only a difference in tone, and he made clear in that interview, and others, that abortion remained a deal-breaker for evangelicals considering a vote for Obama.

Obama's religious supporters insist that emphasizing the candidate's adherence to Jesus' social justice teachings is the key to winning over more religious voters. But economic justice is at the heart of the progressive agenda, with or without a religious imprimatur. If social justice, and not abortion, is indeed the primary issue for religious voters, Obama should be able to reach them—without a gospel stamp of approval. ■

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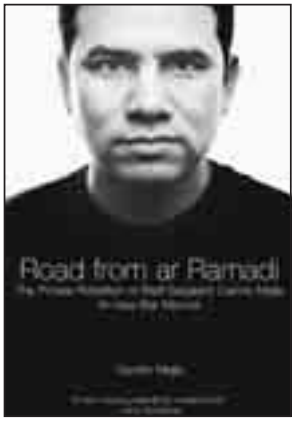

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All Ye Unfaithful

Atheists, agnostics and secularists could be a powerful force. They just need to get organized.

by RONALD ARONSON

As the fading Bush presidency is being greeted with indifference or rolling eyes, one might expect eight years of faith in the White House to have discredited religion in the public square for years to come. But after a generation of the religious right, America is not yet ready to move on to a sensible public understanding of religion. The electrifying arrival of Sarah Palin on the national scene demonstrates the continuing vigor of conservative Christianity and the political power of religiosity.

What about the Democrats' approach? In their hands this troubling trend may be softer and sweeter, but there is great danger that religion will continue to invade public life in unacceptable ways. It's not just that Democrats are courting the evangelical vote; they are treating secularists as if they are invisible and have acquiesced to the twenty-first-century "religious test" for public office. They seem blithely willing to undermine our constitutional commitment to the separation of church and state.

In his 2006 speech "Call to Renewal" Barack Obama struck an ambiguous chord, paying homage to the separation of church and state while insisting that religion must not be left "at the door before entering into the public square." He set out what seemed to be a reassuringly sophisticated path for bringing religion into politics:

"Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or evoke God's will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all."

Obama's universalism offered a potentially profound and sensitive vision of community and unity based on acknowledging rather than suppressing differences. The vision drew its energy from his evident capacity to feel empathy and from his demand that we see the world through other people's eyes.

As the presidential campaign unfolds, however, something very different is happening. The Democrats have conducted a highly organized and many-sided effort to attract evangelical and Catholic voters, based on the political arithmetic that even a small increase in their share of that vote may be enough to defeat the Republicans [see Sarah Posner, "Preaching to the Choir," page 49]. This strategy entails much more than marketing or pandering. It has encouraged the coming out of many Democrats who are religious and an embrace of a new kind of diversity among others who are not. It is creating openings for the progressive religious political breed long championed by Jim Wallis, the evangelical activist and editor of *Sojourners Magazine* who ran faith-and-politics workshops at the Democratic National Convention in Denver.

As Amy Sullivan points out in her book *The Party Faithful*, Democrats have been learning to respect and appeal to the devout. They are discovering that making religious voters feel welcome means making their faith part of the conversation, bringing their concerns into the formulation of public policy and even accepting their ways of judging candidates. Not only that—progressive evangelicals have worked to show that the environment, poverty and war are values issues, demanding the attention of those guided by religious morality.

None of this should be troubling, except that it is carried out in a way that leaves in the cold America's largest minority, out-and-out secularists, and the even larger number of secular believers who stand by Jefferson's "wall of separation" between church and state. Secular humanists, derided by Republicans and the religious right for the past eight years, are confronting a new consensus-in-the-making. This includes:

§ an informal but clear religious test for public office, to which Obama and John McCain submitted when they were cross-examined by mega-church pastor Rick Warren at his Saddleback Church. Each had to answer questions about personal as well as political beliefs: "What does it mean to you to trust in Christ? And what does that mean to you on a daily basis? What does that really look like?"

§ widespread social pressure to believe, based on the pervasive myth that "nearly all Americans" do. This was hammered home repeatedly by Leah Daughtry, Howard Dean's chief of staff and the CEO of the Denver convention, who explained the religious events there by saying, "Democrats have been, are and will continue to be people of faith." Of course, this leaves out atheists, agnostics, humanists, skeptics and freethinkers, people of no religion and many deists and spiritualists.

§ ever more frequent references to God, faith and religion in public life. In a Labor Day speech in Detroit shortened to nine minutes because of Hurricane Gustav, Obama mentioned God and prayer no fewer than six times, including leading the audience in silent prayer for those in possible danger.

§ treating secularists as invisible. Obama, who once seemed keenly respectful of them, appears to have forgotten they exist. On Labor Day, he did not say, "For those threatened by Gustav, let's have a moment of silence, whether in prayer or meditation." Planning the Denver interfaith events, Daughtry ignored the Secular Coalition for America's request to participate.

Paradoxically, in certain ways this new dispensation reflects the fact that the country has become more tolerant. Seventy percent of Americans believe that there are many different paths to salvation. Former doctrinal antagonisms have dissolved into

Ronald Aronson's latest book is Living Without God: New Directions for Atheists, Agnostics, Secularists and the Undecided *(Counterpoint), from which part of this article was adapted.*

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a multi-denominational religiosity that declares that the specifics of one's faith no longer matter—as long as one believes in God. Talking to Larry King after Saddleback, Warren said he could vote for someone of a different faith, but not an atheist. He proclaimed his tolerance while revealing his bigotry.

No less paradoxical, Obama proclaimed his expertise as a constitutional scholar when announcing a "faith-based initiative" that undermines the spirit if not the letter of the Supreme Court's "Lemon test," which requires that laws must not advance religion and "must not foster 'an excessive government entanglement with religion.'" How will Obama's proposed "Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships" choose among competing religious organizations applying for funding, some of which are very large and powerful and some of which are local storefronts? And how will he guarantee an end to discrimination and eliminate proselytizing when these have long been features of many faith-based social service agencies? In trying to capitalize on the perceived popularity of faith-based programs, Obama has clearly chosen to ignore the fact that two-to-one majorities recently indicated a preference for government agencies and nonreligious organizations, rather than religious ones, to provide services for the needy.

It may appear odd that Obama and the Democrats are so unconcerned about the dangers of welcoming religion into the public square after so many years of religious-right influence, capped by eight years of Bush and the current Supreme Court. Perhaps it's because they take no notice of the broad community of secularists and believers who strongly support our secular Constitution.

These two streams add up to at least half of all Democratic voters, but Jacques Berlinerblau, who blogs at The God Vote, explains that Obama and other Democrats have concluded that secularists can be safely ignored. Democrats "did the math around 2005 and figured out that the vaunted 'secular base' was underperforming." Berlinerblau sees American secularism's two parts as "organizationally impotent and incapable of forging a meaningful political alliance."

A striking indication of this disarray is the lack of any grassroots backlash after years of political attacks on secular humanism, public displays of religiosity, bans on gay marriage and stem-cell research, restrictions on abortion, the promoting of creationism and the campaign to appoint judges who favor weakening the separation of church and state. As a result, Berlinerblau writes, "if there was ever a constituency [Obama] could stomp on while moving to The Center, this may be the one."

Unless religious and irreligious secularists overcome their disarray, find their voices and become a political force, there seems to be little chance that Obama's once inspiring call to find common ground will be any more than words, a cover for him to create common ground with those he needs in order to become president and maintain power.

But how will secularists become mobilized? As a group they share no easily discernible characteristics: they cannot be recognized by such markers as color, gender, class or ethnicity, and while they may be more demographically concentrated in some places—in coastal and Northern cities, for example—they certainly cannot be found according to workplace or neighborhood. In short, unless they go out of their way to proclaim

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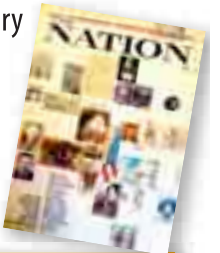

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themselves, the irreligious dispersed across America are unable to see themselves as a "we." Although the Secular Coalition for America calculates from a Harris Interactive Survey that there are more than 60 million US atheists and agnostics, this brave lobby's constituent organizations can claim no more than 100,000 members. Why this shocking discrepancy?

Obviously one reason is that nonbelievers have long been one of the most despised groups in America. Another lies in the fact that secularists may be among the last Americans who consider their beliefs private. Unlike churchgoers, their beliefs, usually arrived at individually, require no organizational expression, so they do not easily become part of a structured community.

Secularists are often quite political but not often on behalf of their secularism; other issues seem far more urgent. Why make a big deal about church-state issues when we need to combat war, poverty and global warming? It is hard to feel very motivated about being ignored, given the pressing need to end Republican rule. And can't the constitutional issues get handled by contributing to lobbies, foundations and legal defense organizations rather than by joining and participating in mass organizations?

A no less stubborn problem is the difficulty nonbelievers have in making common cause with secular believers over issues pertaining to religion. We know from experience that secular and religious people work together on peace, justice and environmental issues but usually without discussing their underlying beliefs. We have all experienced the perils of such conversations, especially because of the profound difference between being guided by faith as opposed to science and reason. Each side has enormous difficulty understanding and respecting the other.

The current religious climate poses new dangers but also new possibilities that may rouse secular America. A Republican victory will keep alive, and possibly even worsen, the in-your-face religiosity of the Bush years. But a Democratic victory will not crush the religious right, and it cannot eliminate Scalia, Thomas, Alito and Roberts from the Supreme Court.

Yet the release of Larry Charles and Bill Maher's film *Religulous*, and the recent presence of six books on the bestseller list advocating atheism or attacking religion, suggests that a sizable number of people are sick of public religiosity. The election of either party may generate the urge for nonbelievers to "out" themselves. Imagine that a significant fraction of atheists, agnostics, secular humanists and skeptics overcame their inhibitions and made themselves seen and heard. Imagine that large numbers connected with one another organizationally in ways that multiplied their overall visibility and political heft. Fed-up secularists might become political about their concerns and figure out how to work with the openly religious. Women, blacks and gays were not invited to enter the public conversation—they *made* themselves part of it. And secularists? Who is to say that at the next Democratic National Convention a secular caucus might not suddenly appear, demanding its place alongside the thirteen other caucuses that were a part of the 2008 convention? What would happen if secularists were visible, recognized and speaking out in their own voice? ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

worse things to say about the organization, but I ignored them.

Three of my sources were independent observers hired by funding agencies to evaluate the project. They were unanimously critical of CI's role and attributed the project's failure to CI's decisions and behavior. It was people in PNG, not I, who used the term "cargo conservation" to describe what CI was doing in Milne Bay. It was they, not I, who expressed disappointment and in some cases a sense of betrayal at the hands of CI's leaders in PNG and Washington.

I'm glad to hear that CI has accounted for the missing money. If it had cooperated with me in the course of my research and later during fact-checking, instead of stonewalling and, until the very last minute, refusing to answer my questions—submitted at their behest in writing—that and other clarifications would have been reported in the article instead of in Seligmann's letter.

But that would not have changed the fact that an arrogant First World organization strode into a tiny Third World country with a lot of grand ideas about how to accomplish conservation with gifts and money and failed to accomplish much.

Mark Dowie

Winehouse 'Better & More Interesting'

Georgetown, Del.

In her haste to drink oh so deeply from a 128-ounce bottle of Haterade of Amy Winehouse, Daphne Brooks left a glaring omission in her review ["Tainted Love," Sept. 29]: for all the civil-rights-related, black-power-and-respect sensibility Motown exuded and inspired, one of its brightest stars, Diana Ross, has a far-and-wide reputation as a world-class bitch and bad-behavior diva extraordinaire. What, she gets a pass because no one ever snapped a picture of her smoking crack?

Don't blame Amy Winehouse just because she's better and more interesting than 95 percent of the soul singers out there. To me Brooks's argument is akin to saying the Clipse are disrespecting Grandmaster Flash (and thus hip-hop) because they rap about selling coke instead of its ill effects on the black community. Please.

It's not Winehouse's fault that Lauryn Hill isn't making records; and while we're on the subject, Hill is *hardly* the "last great hope" for neo-soul hip-hop, as Brooks claims. Uh, Erykah Badu, anyone? Jill Scott? Jamie Lidell? Solange Knowles? Divine Brown (not *that* Divine Brown)?

Patrick Varine

Santa Monica, Calif.

Daphne Brooks may be correct in identifying Amy Winehouse's inspirations, but her characterization of Dame Shirley Bassey as an "Afro-Scottish pop legend" is wildly inaccurate. Bassey was born in 1937 at Tiger Bay, Cardiff, Wales. She is Welsh.

Michael Dear

Boy of Steel Foiled by Error

Takoma Park, Md.

No wonder Superboy failed to prevent Abraham Lincoln's assassination—if he traveled back in time to April 14, 1864, as D.D. Guttenplan's review claims ["An Inky, Well-Paneled Place," Sept. 29]. That means he arrived a year before the end of the Civil War and several months ahead of Lincoln's re-election. Surely Guttenplan intended to say 1865. Tsk tsk.

Fenwick Anderson

Guttenplan Replies

London

The late, great radical journalist (and *Nation* editor) Andrew Kopkind once proposed a magazine, an unofficial compendium of errors titled *Oops!* In the years since, I have often thought, "One for the annals of *Oops!*" I'm thinking it now.

D.D. Guttenplan

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Books & the Arts.

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Jack Abramoff, an unidentified man, Ralph Reed, David Safavian and Ohio Republican Representative Bob Ney (from left) during an August 2002 trip to Scotland

Lords of Misrule

by JEFFERSON DECKER

In 1928 Homer Ferguson, a former president of the Chamber of Commerce, took to the pages of the *Nation's Business* to complain about the federal government. The problems he addressed were not the usual bugbears of red tape, inefficiency and waste. Rather, Ferguson argued that government sometimes worked too well. "A thoroughly first-rate man in public service is corrosive," he said. "He eats holes in our liberties." Even worse was an "enthusiast," that "bright-eyed madman who is frantic to make this the finest government in the world." Ferguson was candid about his animus toward good government. He was a military contractor, building warships for the Navy, and he feared that bright and talented public officials might figure out how to build boats faster and cheaper than he could. Much better a government unworthy of that trust. "The best public servant," he concluded, "is the worst one."

In *The Wrecking Crew*, Thomas Frank argues that the spirit of Homer Ferguson is alive and well in the Republican Party. It was resurrected in the 1980s, when President Reagan appointed an Environmental Protection Agency administrator who opposed most environmental regulation and eviscerated the agency's enforcement division. It lives on in the hapless cronies and inexperienced ideologues the Bush administration has elevated to positions of authority, of whom Michael Brown and Monica Goodling are only the most famous examples. And its presence explains, at least in part, according to Frank, the triumphs of misgovernment to which Americans have been subjected during the past eight years: the incompetent response to Hurricane Katrina, the failure to plan for the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, various scandals involving military contracting and regulatory snafus in matters ranging from food safety to financial markets.

The Wrecking Crew
How Conservatives Rule.
By Thomas Frank.
Metropolitan. 369 pp. $25.

Frank argues that the public failures of the Bush administration are the very essence of conservative government—the predictable outcome of the anti-Washington, free-market ideology that has triumphed within the Republican Party and in national politics over the past three decades. Conservatives won elections by arguing that government is an oversized and unaccountable drag on the economy; they proceeded to starve agencies of funds and replace public-sector employees with private, for-profit contractors. The result is a demoralized, hollowed-out state that does not work very well, except to redistribute wealth from

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taxpayers to corporate lobbyists and interest groups. "Fantastic misgovernment of the kind we have seen is not an accident, nor is it the work of a few bad individuals," Frank writes. "It is the consequence of triumph by a particular philosophy of government, by a movement that understands the liberal state as a perversion and considers the market the ideal nexus of human society."

A journalist and cultural critic with a gift for polemical writing, Frank peppers his account of the evolution of antigovernment governance over the past three decades with observations about life in Washington, from the sartorial tastes of its lobbyists ("these days…orange or lavender" neckties) to the absence of mall rats at the underground shopping center in Arlington's Crystal City ("just army officers in camo and executives in suits"). Such entertaining reportage does not quite conceal a scattershot approach to history, an irritating prosecutorial tone and a cartoon portrait of American conservatism. Still, *The Wrecking Crew* is a useful introduction to a world of pricey lobbyists, crackpot theorists, bought legislators and hapless government. And, in part through these very caricatures, the book gets at some essential questions about politics and markets in a democratic society.

Culture warriors on the campaign trail, conservatives follow the money when they reach office.

At its heart, *The Wrecking Crew* is about two long-term developments in American government. The first is the rise of entrepreneurial politics—of people figuring out how to make big money from the basic stuff of American civic life. The second is what Frank calls the "marketization" of government. This includes the privatization of government functions by for-profit contractors, from the Blackwater guards doing the jobs of soldiers in Iraq to the faith-based charities that were recently supposed to supplant the welfare state. But for Frank, it also includes the broader economy of lobbying, influence peddling, fundraising and fine dining in which public policy gets made. As Frank argues, these two developments have a symbiotic relationship. The entrepreneurial turn in American politics is sustained by the lucrative business opportunities that emerge when private enterprise bores its way into functions that had previously been the exclusive job of the state. When big money can be made from securing government appropriations, Congressional campaigns require ever larger war chests, and when legislators rely on lobbyists to write legislation, new industries and interest groups emerge to cash in.

Frank catalogs a range of behaviors, once beyond the pale, that have become commonplace in Washington. Companies in the contracting business pay enormous bonuses to their employees when they leave for government jobs, in essence keeping staff on retainer even as they formally serve the American people. Lobbyists advertise their record securing "earmarked" appropriations—which legislators insert into spending bills with little oversight or independent assessment of need—on behalf of specific clients. A prominent politician encourages Americans to "invest in politics" as they might in stocks or bonds. A university president whips out a calculator in front of a journalist to figure out the "return on investment" that his institution received from playing the earmark game. In one relatively modest deal, lobbyists charged the University of Alabama $1.5 million for making $123,500 in contributions to Senator Richard Shelby, who in turn earmarked $150 million for the university during the appropriations process. The university multiplied its investment 100 times over, while the lobbyists earned a 1,100 percent return. Everyone won, except the taxpayers footing the bill.

Marketized government can be observed in the raw at restaurants like Charlie Palmer Steak, across the street from Constitution Avenue's premier lobbyist hive. The menu features miniature lobster corn dogs—"a nod to the deep-fried treats of your red-state youth," Frank writes—the décor an "ostentatious glass 'wine cube' perched on a platform over an indoor pond, like a Richard Neutra building in captivity." Frank marvels that with such transparency, a "dedicated, score-keeping fan of lobbying, if such a thing exists, could actually determine which particular vintage was being uncorked to advance which particular political cause." The rewards of the system are on display in Loudoun County, in northern Virginia, where lobbyists have been parking their new wealth. New mansions sprout "like brick-colonial mushrooms" behind "white rail fences of the kind that denote 'horse country.'" As Frank observes, "Every few miles you pass another castle going up, sometimes with stone posterns so large they are seemingly meant to serve as a defensive perimeter. Battlements are very much in vogue; one house I saw had matching his 'n' hers turrets on either end."

According to Frank, these developments have been made possible by the ideological triumph during the past thirty years of "the market" as a means of organizing society over its primary competitors—namely tradition, organized labor and the state. Believing that markets are always more efficient and fairer than government, conservatives pushed to deregulate the economy and reduce the size of the state. When that was not possible, the right pushed for the next best thing, as they saw it: handing government over to business and letting it regulate itself. This is hardly the same thing. Privatization still requires that some government official dole out contracts; business often wants protection or subsidies from government, not a competitive marketplace. It is, rather, what political scientists would call the "capture" of a liberal state by corporations and their representatives. Helpfully, though, faith in the market could justify this process as well, since it presumed that the private sector, battle-tested by competitive markets, would always be lean, efficient and competent compared with government, and because it elevated risk-taking, entrepreneurial businessmen over those petty, grasping bureaucrats. (The idea that the private sector might want to enrich itself at public expense was conveniently forgotten.)

As the market triumphed, the idea of competent government or disinterested judgment waned. And so, Washington embraces the revolving door between military contractors and government procurement offices as a positive, since business experience trumps independence. And anyway, notes *Washington Post* columnist Steven Pearlstein, every major contractor takes part in the revolving door, so nobody should get an unfair advantage. The *Post* has also celebrated the lobbying fortunes that have accumulated in metro Washington as an example of local enterprise—not the organized bilking of taxpayers. Libertarian pundit Doug Bandow defends himself for receiving payoffs from disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff in exchange for puffing Abramoff's clients in print. "The number of folks underwriting the pursuit of pure knowledge can be counted on one hand, if not one finger," he scoffs. Of course, the triumph of the market also provides electoral rewards. While Americans like a government that provides clean air, pure food and a safe workplace, they are much less fond of bumbling. So voters reward wrecking crews for their incompetence, angrily electing people who will hack the state down further.

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Frank builds his case through a combination of observation, historical anecdote and close attention to the ideas and agendas of some of the conservative movement's chief operators. He returns repeatedly to Grover Norquist, the anti-tax advocate and Republican strategist. Norquist is a libertarian and a political obsessive given to violent metaphors; he once said that he wanted to shrink the government until he could "drown it in a bathtub." In his main public gig, he heads up Americans for Tax Reform, but he also has a career as a lobbyist and political strategist, dating back to the early 1980s. That was when Norquist, fresh out of Harvard Business School, teamed up with a young conservative activist named Jack Abramoff to take over the College Republicans and turn an ineffectual group of résumé padders into a lightning brigade of the new right. (Among other things, they changed the group's slogan from "The Best Party in Town" to "Join the Revolution.")

Since then, Norquist has worked tirelessly to persuade business groups to support conservative Republicans rather than spread money around to both sides. Norquist sees politics as ideological warfare, and the conservative position on markets gets undermined when corporate America treats liberal government as a legitimate player in a pluralistic system instead of a cancer on the body politic that needs to be excised. The problem, for Norquist, is that many corporations are run by "morons, idiots" who do not understand their financial stake in an ideological war and thus fail to act ruthlessly or strategically. Indeed, for Norquist, the usual Washington discussion of how to get money out of politics is "turned upside down," with Norquist determined "to get money into politics in large enough amounts that [the cash] starts to behave rationally" and corporations seek the highest return on investment. For Norquist this means defending free-market capitalism and the Republican Party in practical and ideological terms while avoiding defensive or PR-oriented spending on Democrats or liberal public-interest groups.

Norquist is a perfect foil for Frank, since both men are political pugilists with a taste for grand strategy. And they share a basic assumption about American politics: that conservatism is, at root, the political philosophy of the business class. Norquist thinks the philosophy virtuous; Frank deems it chicanery. "Conservatism-in-power is a very different beast from the conservatism we meet on the streets of Wichita or the conservatism we overhear talking to itself on the pages of *Free Republic*," Frank writes. Although conservatives are culture warriors on the campaign trail, they get down to business and follow the money when they reach office. And Frank believes that Norquist's agenda—reducing regulations, weakening labor unions and the liberal nonprofit sector, eliminating progressive income taxes and cutting the welfare state—satisfies the needs of the business community. "Money gravitates to right-wing pressure groups like Norquist's—as well as the Club for Growth, and the Chamber of Commerce—because *that is the rational thing for money to do*," he writes. "That's how you deliver shareholder value."

In many ways, this argument is an extension of the ones made by Frank in two previous books, *One Market Under God* (2000) and *What's the Matter With Kansas?* (2004). The former was an account of the varieties of "market populism" that took hold during the 1990s, while the latter described the political and social transformation of Frank's boyhood home as social conservatives took over the state's Republican Party. Both held the general view that conservatism is a political philosophy of the minority of Americans who stand to benefit economically from low wages, regressive taxes and an unregulated economy—and who need to make a broader pitch to the electorate to stay in power. In *One Market Under God*, Frank argued that in the '90s, market populism—the idea that markets are a perfect reflection of our human desires and an engine of self-creation and liberation—had replaced "backlash" as the primary argument of the right. In *What's the Matter With Kansas?* backlash made a dramatic return, with Frank describing the war on liberalism as it took place at gun shows, on talk radio, through Operation Rescue campaigns and in the rants of "bitter self-made men." But the shift was only in the set of ideas that won over a majority. Conservatives still governed the same way: opening markets, cutting taxes, repealing the New Deal and expanding the gaps in income and wealth.

This is an oversimplification of conservatism. For one thing, Frank summarily writes cultural traditionalism out of the history of the right's philosophy of governing. It may be true, as he suggests, that unrestrained capitalism is the primary force eroding the small towns and faith-based values that social conservatives insist they want to defend. But that has not prevented cultural conservatives from using the state to promote traditionalist ends (for example, in the myriad rules thrown up to restrict access to abortion in the federally funded parts of the healthcare system) or allowing theological judgments to bias public policy responses (for example, in the Reagan administration's sluggish initial response to the AIDS crisis). For another, Frank relies on "the market" to explain too much and to stand for a variety of quite different processes. There is a significant distinction between a competitive free market and a government-run contracting bazaar, even if the ideas used to promote the former can help justify the latter. Privatized government is still government. It is funded by the state's exclusive authority to tax; it relies on public officials (whose personal interests in a new job or campaign contributions are often at odds with the public interest they are supposed to represent) to make "consumption" decisions on behalf of everyone else; and it ultimately responds to political instead of market pressures. As a result, it is prone to informational failures and inside dealing that are not present in a standard consumer marketplace. In fact, much of what Frank describes as the "marketization" of government strikes me as the opposite: if you do away with the rules and regulations that created standards and required competitive bidding, you end up replacing a competitive marketplace with lucrative handouts for the well connected. Nor is there anything particularly marketlike about, say, a GOP Congress ordering business to hire Republican lobbyists and threatening to use the state for revenge if they fail, another bill in Frank's indictment of the right. Rather, it is state power in the service of partisan politics.

More polemicist than historian, Frank relies on 'the market' to explain too much about politics.

As a historian Frank also ignores a number of subtleties. He does not address the good-government tradition in conservatism—the idea that government is most effective when it does a limited number of things very well—which was well represented as recently as the Reagan administration. His evidence for a hollowed-out state rings true to me, but it is nevertheless largely anecdotal. He ignores the various ways American government has long been a "public-private partnership" and takes an idealized view of the government's autonomy and professionalism during the post–New Deal era. And he gives only a sketchy account of the entrepreneurial government that preceded the conservative ascendancy. Frank notes in passing how former New Dealers like Thurman Arnold cashed in on their exper-

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tise by helping corporations navigate the regulations they had written, and how the person who pioneered the marketing of legislative earmarks (and built a $125 million lobbying fortune out of the business) was a Democrat and former McGovern staffer named Gerald Cassidy. (He might have added that American tort law has helped to create a privatized regulatory state, with health and safety standards held in place by threat of lawsuits, with a handful of plaintiffs' attorneys becoming fabulously wealthy in the process, which is another reason those fortunes drive people like Grover Norquist to distraction.) But he does not give a full enough account of these other forms of political entrepreneurship for his readers to make meaningful distinctions between the liberal and conservative versions. The right did not invent machine politics, and it is hardly the only movement that discovered it could further ideological objectives, help out its constituent interest groups and sustain its future electoral prospects at the same time.

Most of these faults are the result of the format—Frank is here to prosecute a case against the right, not to explore exculpatory evidence. And that allows him to focus on dissecting the right's ideas and pushing them to their logical conclusion. In *What's the Matter With Kansas?* this method led Frank to suggest that whatever their decency, honesty and good faith, many Americans from all walks of life believe some pretty incoherent things about politics, science, religion and economics. There, Frank described an entire political culture of psychological projection, in which the privileged daughters of New Canaan believe themselves to be tribunes of the working man, middle-class Kansans think that free trade and a flat tax will save their home and church, liberal movie stars sport lifestyle liberalism in *People* magazine and artists think that dunking a likeness of Jesus in urine (or the equivalent) sticks it to the man. In *The Wrecking Crew*, this same interest in normative extremes eventually leads Frank to South Africa and the South Pacific, where he believes the principles of conservative government have come closest to their idealized form.

During the 1980s, some of conservatism's leading lights had a fondness for apartheid South Africa. For most, the country was a victim, its human rights abuses singled out by the left merely because it was a staunch anti-Communist ally of the United States. (What about human rights horrors within the Soviet bloc? conservatives parried.) Others, including the young Jack Abramoff, seemed to find something genuine to like about South Africa, and they spent significant time and energy trying to defend it from international sanctions and opprobrium. Except for a few racist cranks, conservatives held that the system of race-based oppression that was apartheid was not a positive but did provide a means to an invaluable end. By excluding the majority of the population from exercising basic rights, government stayed in the hands of the relatively powerful few, business got the help it requested, the expansion of the welfare state could be resisted and wealth could flow to a few winners. It was, in short, a sort of wrecking crew utopia.

The contemporary equivalent, Frank writes, is the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, a legal netherworld on the edge of American sovereignty where the local economy is built around its exemption from minimum-wage laws, immigration policies and federal legal protections. Much of the working population consists of imported "guest workers" from mainland Asia who are never expected to become citizens. Native-born islanders use the local government to promote the tourism and sweatshop industries, shut out labor unions and keep taxes on business low. Visitors come to Saipan for its golf courses and its thriving sex trade, the latter serving as the night shift for many of the low-wage workers the island has imported for its textile factories. Police help local businessmen maintain order by beating and deporting troublesome employees. "All must adopt a pro-business mindset," one local politician declared, or "be prepared for a permanent reassignment elsewhere." Here the spirit of Homer Ferguson must be perplexed: an enthusiast on the side of business?

And yet for some on the right, the place is a paradise. Abramoff organized a campaign to save the Commonwealth from reformers in Congress; libertarians called it a "laboratory of liberty." Tom DeLay suggested that the United States, rather than thinking about reforms, should begin emulating the islands' immigration policies. The idea, as Frank writes, of a "corporate labor camp, with wages free to fall as low as the market sees fit, an electorate drawn only from the winners, a wildly pro-business government, and savagely pro-business newspapers" has philosophical appeal to part of the population. Even if this idea represents only one component of the conservative coalition, *The Wrecking Crew* provides an entertaining and engaging account of the road to Saipan. ■

Civic Virtues

by GEORGE SCIALABBA

Gore Vidal has known, or at any rate met, nearly everyone of literary, political or cinematic note during his lifetime. A great many of his essays feature anecdotes, always charming and often revealing, about his personal encounters with his subjects: Tennessee Williams, Dawn Powell, Christopher Isherwood, Norman Mailer, Paul Bowles, Anthony Burgess, Italo Calvino, Amelia Earhart, Orson Welles, Frank Sinatra, the Roosevelts, Luces, Kennedys, Reagans and Gores among them.

I have never met Gore Vidal. But that seems a paltry reason for not beginning this homage in the proper Vidalian key. All right, then…

One night in the winter of 1970, I was driving a taxicab in New York City. Outside a posh club, I was hailed by a tall, handsome gent in evening dress. "Old bores," he muttered as he climbed in. "Money and brains; never the twain shall meet without giving rise to truly lethal tedium."

"Where to?" I piped up.

"Wherever I can find some intelligent company," he sighed.

From a certain lyrical eloquence in the sigh, I guessed he meant literary company. "How about Elaine's?" I suggested, glancing at him in the rearview mirror.

George Scialabba is the author of Divided Mind *and the forthcoming* What Are Intellectuals Good For?

DOUBLEDAY

Gore Vidal

The Selected Essays of Gore Vidal
Edited by Jay Parini.
Doubleday. 458 pp. $27.50.

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He winced. "No-o-o, thank you. Norman is probably presiding tonight. I'm not feeling sufficiently…existential."

"The Gotham Book Mart is probably still open. Lots of writers hang out there, I think."

The handsome face wrinkled in distaste. "Also a few literary parasites, I'm afraid. I doubt I could control myself if I spotted Truman's malicious mug leering in my direction."

"Well, maybe the White Horse Tavern?"

He blanched. "Good God, no. Anaïs sometimes holds court there, fabulating reminiscences and emanating her legendary Life Force. Of course, she's the source of that legend."

I looked more closely in the rearview, and this time I recognized him. "You're Gore Vidal, aren't you?"

Wary, noncommittal, slightly amused, he murmured: "Possibly."

I was inspired. "Well, why don't I just drive you home? Then you can have a nightcap alone, in the company of the most extraordinary assemblage of wit and talent since JFK invited all those intellectuals to dinner at the White House."

He snorted appreciatively, reached over and patted my head, and when I let him off at his hotel, gave me the biggest tip of my short cab-driving career.

Eugene Luther Gore Vidal Jr. has always enjoyed a healthy appreciation of his own, indeed remarkable, wit and talent. So have most other people, though approbation of his moral character has perhaps been less close to universal. His successes—bestselling novels, Broadway plays, screenplays, two enchanting memoirs and five decades of scintillating literary and political criticism—would be tedious to chronicle (and superfluous in the Age of Wikigooglespace). But what do they add up to? Is he famous for some more enduring reason than… being famous?

He grew up in the penumbra of fame. His maternal grandfather, T.P. Gore, was more or less heroic: blind, Oklahoma's first senator and a friend of Bryan and Darrow, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. His father, Gene Vidal, was an All-American football player, World War I aviator, friend of Lindbergh and Earhart and founder of TWA. His mother later married that socialite of socialites Hugh Auchincloss, who would later become Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy's stepfather as well.

In the vast attic of his grandparents' house in Rock Creek Park were thousands of books. Up there and downstairs, reading to his grandfather, he acquired an education. At school—he attended St. Alban's, like his younger cousin Albert Arnold Gore—he picked up Latin and fell in love with a godlike fellow student, who died a few years later, young and still perfect, on Iwo Jima. As told in Vidal's memoir *Palimpsest*, it is one of the most stirring love stories in recent literature.

A veteran himself, Vidal published one of the first World War II novels, *Williwaw*. Public service in the family tradition was one possible future. Instead he wrote *The City and the Pillar*, a novel about a youthful homosexual affair that one of the boys, but not the other, leaves behind. So much for his political career, at least as of 1948.

Vidal spent the '50s in the trenches, writing for television, Hollywood and Broadway. He cavorted with the stars—Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward and far too many others to mention. More perilously for his soul's health, he also cavorted with the Kennedys. But by the end of 1961, the moral and intellectual hollowness of Camelot was plain to him. With his nest egg, he left for Italy and novel writing. In that place (which he left several years ago) and that activity he spent what he would doubtless call, with self-

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It would be hard—and is, of course, unnecessary—to decide whether Vidal's novels or his essays are his greatest achievement. Certainly the seven-volume "American Chronicles" series is in the front rank of historical fiction; and at least two volumes, *Burr* and *Lincoln*, are indisputably masterpieces. *Julian*, it seems safe to wager, will long remain the only novel set in the fourth century, with a protagonist dedicated to turning back the fateful onrush of Christian fanaticism, ever to ascend to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list. *Myra Breckinridge* was a minor milestone in the sexual revolution—perhaps not so minor.

Essay writing was an afterthought. Edmund Wilson, too, would have preferred writing novels and plays to literary journalism—who wouldn't?—but he was never as successful as Vidal. As a result, Vidal tells us in *Palimpsest*,

> I never wrote a proper essay until 1954, when I read a new translation of Suetonius' *Twelve Caesars*. Suddenly, I had so many new thoughts on the subject of sex and power that I was obliged to write an essay…not for publication but just to clear my own mind. Eventually, it was published…and that is how I became an essayist. I wrote first for myself; then for those few readers who might be interested in the resulting *essai*.

It was, he acknowledged, "not exactly novel writing, which I missed, but it was prose and kept me thinking" while he was churning out those scripts, earning that nest egg.

The fruits of those fifty-plus years of thinking on paper are harvested in *Selected Essays*. The first thing to say is that this new collection does not replace *United States: Essays 1952–1992* and *The Last Empire: Essays 1992–2000*. Nothing could. The former, in particular, is the best essay collection in recent decades by any American writer, except perhaps for last year's two-volume Library of America edition of Edmund Wilson. At 1,300 pages, *United States* is, however, a little bulky. So there is every reason to cheer Vidal on his way to Valhalla with the publication of this compact yet comprehensive and very well-chosen volume. Editor Jay Parini has served up a kind of crème de la crème with strawberries.

Vidal is perhaps better known for his raspberries, which are well represented here by "American Plastic," "The Hacks of Academe" and "The Top Ten Best-Sellers According to the Sunday *New York Times* as of January 7, 1973." The first of these, though by no means a hatchet job, does make one grateful not to have read much of John Barth or Donald Barthelme. It also expresses a far more discriminating admiration for William Gass than is usual among reviewers of that overadmired writer. But nothing in "American Plastic" equals the joyous havoc wrought on the bestsellers, whose roots, structural and thematic, in bad Hollywood movies Vidal convincingly demonstrates. Poor Herman Wouk (*Winds of War*) and Frederick Forsyth (*The Odessa File*) receive a brisk version of the treatment meted out to James Gould Cozzens by Dwight Macdonald and to Judith Krantz by Clive James. Even "the noble engineer Solzhenitsyn" (*August 1914*), though an exemplar of "man's indomitable spirit in a tyrannous society," is chiefly talented at "describing how things work, and it is plain that nature destined him to write manuals of artillery or instructions on how to take apart a threshing machine."

Though Vidal can be devastatingly snide ("Rabbit's Own Burrow" makes John Updike pay very dearly indeed for a few censorious remarks about our hero and other "frivolous" opponents of the Vietnam War), his generosity is more characteristic and even more satisfying. Some of his subjects in *Selected Essays*, like Tennessee Williams and Edmund Wilson, may not have needed critical rehabilitation, but William Dean Howells and Dawn Powell did. Twenty-five years ago, Howells was frequently dismissed as dry and lifeless, the faded flower of a genteel tradition. Explicating *Indian Summer*, *A Modern Instance* and *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Vidal reconstructs Howells's "subtle and wise reading of the world," which "opened the way to Dreiser and to all those other realists who were to see the United States plain." And the first half-dozen pages of the Howells essay contain a surprising revelation. As the judicial murder of the Haymarket Square defendants unfolded in 1886, "of the Republic's major literary and intellectual figures…only one"—Howells—"took a public stand."

Dawn Powell's novels were all out of print in 1987 when Vidal's long appreciation in *The New York Review of Books* pronounced her "our best comic novelist." Her studies of genuine Midwestern dullness and ersatz Manhattan gaiety, rendered with fearless, pungent wit and entirely without sentimentality or euphemism, may have been, as Vidal claimed, "Balzacian" and as good a portrait as we have of mid-twentieth-century America. But in this they were fatally unlike the top ten bestsellers of 1973 or any other year. She died more or less obscure in 1965, and Vidal's influential revaluation doubtless brought a smile to her long-suffering shade.

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The hacks of academe (new generation) have put it about that everything is political, especially textual analyses of great literature that reveal, through the application of emancipatory ideology and subversive wordplay, that the past was even less enlightened than the present. Besides allowing critical minnows to patronize artistic whales, this approach frees academic literary intellectuals from having to learn much about history, economics, politics or how to compose felicitous English prose.

Without ever saying so, Vidal also manages to suggest that everything is political, though in a very different, non-postmodern sense. The clarity and elegance of his prose, for example, make a political point: that a critic with public purposes has rhetorical obligations, above all transparency. More generally, to a sufficiently sensitive and knowledgeable critic, everything will appear intelligent or unintelligent, skillful or shoddy, graceful or graceless, truthful or mendacious. In each of these pairs, the latter is—not immediately, perhaps, but ultimately, in some measure—a threat to our common life, our *res publica*. Intellectual virtues are civic virtues; intellectual vices leave the citizens vulnerable to superstition and demagoguery. There is, of course, no more sense in trying to legislate the intellectual virtues than the moral ones. But one can propagate intellectual virtue, first of all by example. This is Vidal's abiding contribution to American politics.

The prevailing American superstitions are: one, there is a Supreme Being, omnipotent and benevolent; two, some sexual predilections are more natural than others; and three, there is no class system in the United States. No one who denies any of these things can be elected to high office. As a patriot, Vidal naturally has no patience with this affront to our civic intelligence. Some of his most memorable onslaughts on our national delusions are included in *Selected Essays*.

"Monotheism and Its Discontents," a version of which appeared in these pages (July 13, 1992), is forthright. "The great unmentionable evil at the center of our culture is monotheism." Vidal's dislike is ecumenical; Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all "sky-god religions." The sky-god is, alas, a jealous god, whose intolerance and blood lust have set a very bad example for his more devoted followers, whose unyielding irrationality managed in only a few decades, Vidal laments, to pervert the founders' entirely secular purposes. "Monotheism" was written in 1992; sixteen years later, the danger is much more widely recognized. I

— A Call to the Media —

For many years men have awaited, impatiently to be sure, evidence that Maitreya* does in truth exist, and carries out his work among us. Why this doubt should for so long persist is, perhaps, difficult to understand, given the vast transformations of our world which have clearly taken place, each one foretold by Maitreya, and made available to the public and world media. What prevents the acceptance – even as a hypothesis – that such a welcome event has indeed transpired?

"The media of the world know every facet of this information, however little they inform the public of its nature."

The media of the world know every facet of this information, however little they inform the public of its nature. Many of its representatives have met Maitreya, have heard him speak, and yet stay silent themselves.

Laws

Why should this be so? What inhibits the public announcement of this welcome news? In the main the problem is fear: fear of ridicule, fear of disbelief; fear of loss, of their status or jobs; fear that they are somehow beguiled, that they did not see what they saw or hear what they heard. It is easier to set their experiences aside and to leave it to Maitreya himself – if he does indeed exist – to come forward and show the world his factual presence.

This view, logical enough to those who thus wait silently, shows little understanding of the Laws which govern the appearance of a Teacher of Maitreya's stature.

Many worthy Teachers come into our lives, do their work, and cause few ripples on the surface of men's thought and action. They seldom need forerunners to prepare their way. Maitreya, however, is the World Teacher, Head of Hierarchy, and intends to serve as such for the next world cycle. His impact on humanity cannot be comprehended. His coming is a truly momentous happening, which must be prepared for beforehand, and adequately explained to men of every station.

The world's media are ideally placed to acquaint men with the true happenings of our time. They are looked to for information, and often guidance, by millions of people thirsty for the truth, for knowledge and hope. It behoves the men and women of the media, men and women of goodwill, to acquaint *themselves* with this information, where necessary, and to serve the public by its serious introduction. Then will they see Maitreya openly, ready to show us all how to set to rights the world.

*This article, published in *Share International* magazine, was written by a Master of Wisdom. The Masters, headed by Maitreya, the World Teacher, are highly advanced teachers and advisors of humanity who are planning to work openly in the world very soon.

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suspect Vidal's puckish but prescient call for "an all-out war on the monotheists" had some effect in stimulating the salutary secularist counteroffensive.

In (possibly premature) retrospect, it appears that one historical function of neoconservatism was to supply an intellectual rationale for the worst impulses of traditional conservatism. The attack on the welfare state rationalized—in effect if not intention—greed and class privilege. With the same qualification, the attack on affirmative action rationalized racial hostility. The attack on multilateralism and international law has, less ambiguously, rationalized national chauvinism and aggressive tribalism. Midge Decter's "The Boys on the Beach," a vaguely Freudian analysis of homosexuality as pathology, published in *Commentary* in 1980, was a not at all ambiguous effort to rationalize sexual bigotry. But thanks to Vidal, this was the least successful of all the neoconservative ideological operations. "Pink Triangle and Yellow Star"—perhaps his best-known essay—so thoroughly demolished Decter's smug fatuities that neither the pseudo-psychoanalytic approach to homosexuality nor, mercifully, Decter herself ever regained intellectual respectability.

My favorites among Vidal's essays, both included in this volume, are "Homage to Daniel Shays" and "The Second American Revolution." Soon after the Revolutionary War, the eternal tension between lenders and borrowers, the rich and everyone else, came to a crisis in New England. Shays led thousands of small farmers, many of them former soldiers in the revolutionary army who stood to lose their land to creditors, in search of debt relief and tax relief. The rich fought back, first militarily and then by writing a Constitution that imposed a strong central government disproportionately weighted in favor of the propertied.

That Constitution has become the American Scripture, our political Holy Writ and a chronic obstacle to popular initiative. Dissolving the mystique of the Constitution and those who framed it, as well as that of the revered *Federalist Papers*—whose "general tone," Vidal accurately observes, "is that of a meeting of the trust department of Sullivan and Cromwell"—is essential to our civic health. These two essays, along with Vidal's historical fiction, are powerful dissolving agents.

Disabusing Americans about their government's international behavior is equally essential. After a PEN benefit one night in the mid-1980s, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. confided to his diary, "Gore gave a (relatively) polished talk about the American empire, banal in content, cheap in tone, and delivered to the accompaniment of smiles of vast self-satisfaction." Presumably it was the tone Schlesinger objected to; his own self-satisfied banalities about the American empire were always pronounced with reverence and gravitas.

Vidal's bête noire (and not surprisingly, Schlesinger's hero) was Harry Truman. The National Security Act of 1947; the creation of the CIA, with its unconstitutional exemption from Congressional scrutiny; the containment doctrine, supposedly for defense against Soviet expansionism but promptly invoked to justify the rearming of Germany and interventions in Greece, Guatemala, Iran and elsewhere; the paranoid secret blueprint for the cold war, NSC-68—all these Truman-era setbacks for democracy are described in "The National Security State," along with a modest and sensible five-point program that, decades later, still sounds like a very good way to begin reclaiming the country.

It's not clear, though, to me and I suspect to Vidal, that American democracy can be reclaimed, at least in the form of vigorous, Jeffersonian self-government. (As Vidal points out with his customary sardonic relish, Jefferson began selling out Jeffersonianism during his second term.) The reasons are structural—mass production and mass consumption may not leave enough room for individual autonomy—and clinical—like muscles, intellectual and civic virtues may atrophy beyond repair. No matter who is elected president this fall, the country may become an ever more dispiriting place for a conservative-radical aristocratic republican of Vidal's stamp.

If so, he has much to teach us about grace in an era of decline. Twice before, he has lived, in imagination, through the death of a cherished ideal. The first was paganism, splendidly memorialized in *Julian*. In that novel's climactic scene, the eponymous emperor appeals to the assembled Christian bishops, who are bent on destroying traditional religion, "never to forget that the greatness of our world was the gift of other gods and a different, more subtle philosophy, reflecting the variety in nature." Of course, that more subtle philosophy was soon driven underground, where it has remained ever since. But things can live a long time underground, especially when nourished by occasional infusions like *Julian*.

"French Letters: Theories of the New Novel," another well-known essay reprinted here, reports on the programmatic writings of Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Roland Barthes and their American enthusiasts, none of whom saw much of a future for the traditional novel. Vidal agreed, not because the traditional novel is exhausted but because its traditional audience has been captured by electronic distractions. He greeted this melancholy prospect with barbed but eloquent stoicism:

> The portentous theorizings of the New Novelists are of no more use to us than the self-conscious avant-gardism of those who are forever trying to figure out what the next "really serious" thing will be when it is plain that there is not going to be a next serious thing in the novel. Our lovely vulgar and most human art is at an end, if not the end. Yet that is no reason not to want to practice it, or even to read it. In any case, rather like priests who have forgotten the meaning of the prayers they chant, we shall go on for quite a long time talking of books and writing books, pretending all the while not to notice that the church is empty and the parishioners have gone elsewhere to attend other gods, perhaps in silence or with new words.

Whatever dreariness lies ahead for our endlessly benighted and bamboozled republic, Gore Vidal's mocking, disenchanted patriotism will always be a resource for its well-wishers. ■

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OSIP MANDELSTAM

(Translated from the Russian by John High)

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Credenzas of Fragmentation

by NATASHA WIMMER

What Can I Do When Everything's on Fire?
By António Lobo Antunes.
Translated by Gregory Rabassa.
Norton. 585 pp. Paper $19.95.

When José Saramago won the Nobel Prize in 1998, there were those who believed that the wrong writer had been chosen. António Lobo Antunes, it was said, was the more deeply Portuguese novelist, a writer who returned obsessively to the streets of his native Lisbon and plumbed the troubled national psyche in high-Modernist prose, while Saramago, a fabulist and an allegorist, addressed the universal struggle of human beings to thrive in a dehumanized world. Perhaps ironically, Saramago's global vision triumphed, and Lobo Antunes was left out in the cold. When asked by the *New York Times* for his response to the announcement of the award, Lobo Antunes replied, "This phone doesn't work!" and hung up.

Though his Nobel hopes were dashed (he had declared that if he won, he would at last give up his job as a clinical psychiatrist), Lobo Antunes has continued to write as prolifically as ever. Since he began, in 1979, with the fictionalized memoir *South of Nowhere*, he has produced at least one novel every two years (though only about half have been translated into English), writing in fractured, allusive prose about a country inhabited by tormented young men (*An Explanation of the Birds*), corrupt officials (*The Inquisitors' Manual*), haunted soldiers (*Fado Alexandrino*) and twisted families (all of the above). He served in Angola in the early '70s, a reluctant participant in Portugal's brutal colonial war, and his experiences as a military doctor and as a young man living under the authoritarian regime of António Salazar are the touchstones of his fiction.

In *What Can I Do When Everything's on Fire?*, his most recent novel to be published in English (it appeared in Portuguese in 2001), Lobo Antunes tantalizes with an unexpected suggestion of glitz. The setting is ostensibly Lisbon's transvestite cabaret scene, a world of colored light bulbs and spangled tiaras. But the real stage is a grayer place, a broad expanse of Lisbon roamed by the son of a drag queen, a lost boy who despairs of finding a real family in the wasteland of his past. Paulo tells his story from the asylum where he's been interned for a while as an adult. His mother, Judite, is a onetime teacher turned drunk who sells her favors to the neighbors for pocket change; his father, Carlos, abandoned the family to dance and lip-sync at a Lisbon club. As a small boy, Paulo is taken away from his mother by the state and sent to live with Dona Helena and Mr. Couceiro, an older couple whose daughter died in childhood. They do their best to provide Paulo with love and stability, but it's too late. By the time he reaches the asylum, he's caught up in an endless recitation of remembered and imagined tragedy.

At the center of Paulo's mental world is a little house in Bico da Areia on the Tagus estuary just outside Lisbon. This is the place where he lived with his mother and father, and he returns to it in memory again and again, dwelling obsessively on a handful of incidents and images: a car with wooden wheels, a gentian in bud, the Gypsies' horses, the boys who come to visit his mother ("pups with pine cones bulging in their pockets"). Among the other landmarks in his personal geography are the asylum (plane trees, cigarettes), the neighborhood where he goes to buy heroin (a broken-down wall, a mulatto with a jackknife) and the Couceiros' apartment (a fading photograph, a bicycle with flat tires). These images continually crop up, gathering substance and associative power with repetition. They are the leitmotifs of the novel, and just as they enable Paulo to construct a coherent account of his life, they guide the reader through the intricate clutter of the tale.

Such guidance is essential, because even by Lobo Antunes's standards, this is a virtuosic effort. From the start, the novel rises to credenzas of fragmentation, replicating Paulo's disturbed patterns of thought. The beginnings and ends of sentences are lopped off and different voices are patched together, breaking away abruptly or dissolving without a trace. This often leads to inspired juxtapositions, at once surreal and logical: "Dona Helena without stopping her crocheting to repair a stitch that had become broken from rubbing her back, as she got older her twisted spine, a growing hump." Over the course of the best chapters, Lobo Antunes displays an almost magical skill, sowing hints and bits of information in a cloud of detail that gradually resolves into a clear picture. Words and details impressed on the mind in the early pages must be retrieved in order to comprehend events in the later pages, and the effect is like a verbal optical illusion, images burned onto the retina or the brain and projected into three-dimensional space.

Lobo Antunes is fortunate in his translators. Gregory Rabassa, like Richard Zenith, is adept at re-creating the staggered flow of the writer's prose. A key task of the translator is to find a sustained and natural rhythm, and here that is particularly essential. Rabassa, who also translated *Fado Alexandrino* and *The Return of the Caravels*, has written about translating Lobo Antunes in his memoir *If This Be Treason*, and he has a prescription for readers who find the going difficult: "My advice to readers is simply to read, approach him once again as though…they were listening to one of Beethoven's late quartets through sheer hearing."

Even sheer hearing, however, fails to dispel the occasional sense that this latest novel suffers from overorchestration. There are moments when the words overwhelm the story they are meant to convey and the melody is lost. This is most often true when the novel strays from Paulo's narrative, spending long stretches of time in the minds of some of the less intriguing characters and giving short shrift to more central figures. Most of all, the focus shifts too frequently away from Paulo's relationship with the man he calls his father.

Carlos—or Soraia, as she prefers to be known—is one of the few truly sympathetic characters in the novel. She isn't Paulo's real father (even Judite can't say who that might be), but she tries to play some role in the boy's life, fitting him in between assignations with patrons of the club where she works. While Soraia entertains her clients, Paulo waits in the park across the street, watching the windows of her ground-floor apartment, a ramshackle place furnished with kitschy care and another mental landmark for Paulo. As a child, Paulo is at once drawn to his father and ashamed of him (the shame is mutual: Soraia is reluctant to call Paulo her son in front of the other drag queens). As an adult, Paulo grows closer to Soraia, becoming friendly with Rui, Soraia's young lover. Rui, a handsome boy from a prosperous family, introduces Paulo to heroin and compulsive thievery, with Soraia as their common mark.

Though Paulo treats Soraia poorly—at one point, he stoops so low as to steal her false teeth—to a great extent he makes her world his own. The other transvestites at the club are like his aunts, and together with Dona Amélia, the woman who sells candy at the club, they make up a kind of unorthodox family. In one poignantly strange scene, Paulo, Soraia and Rui pay a visit to Dona

Natasha Wimmer's translation of Roberto Bolaño's 2666 will be published in November.

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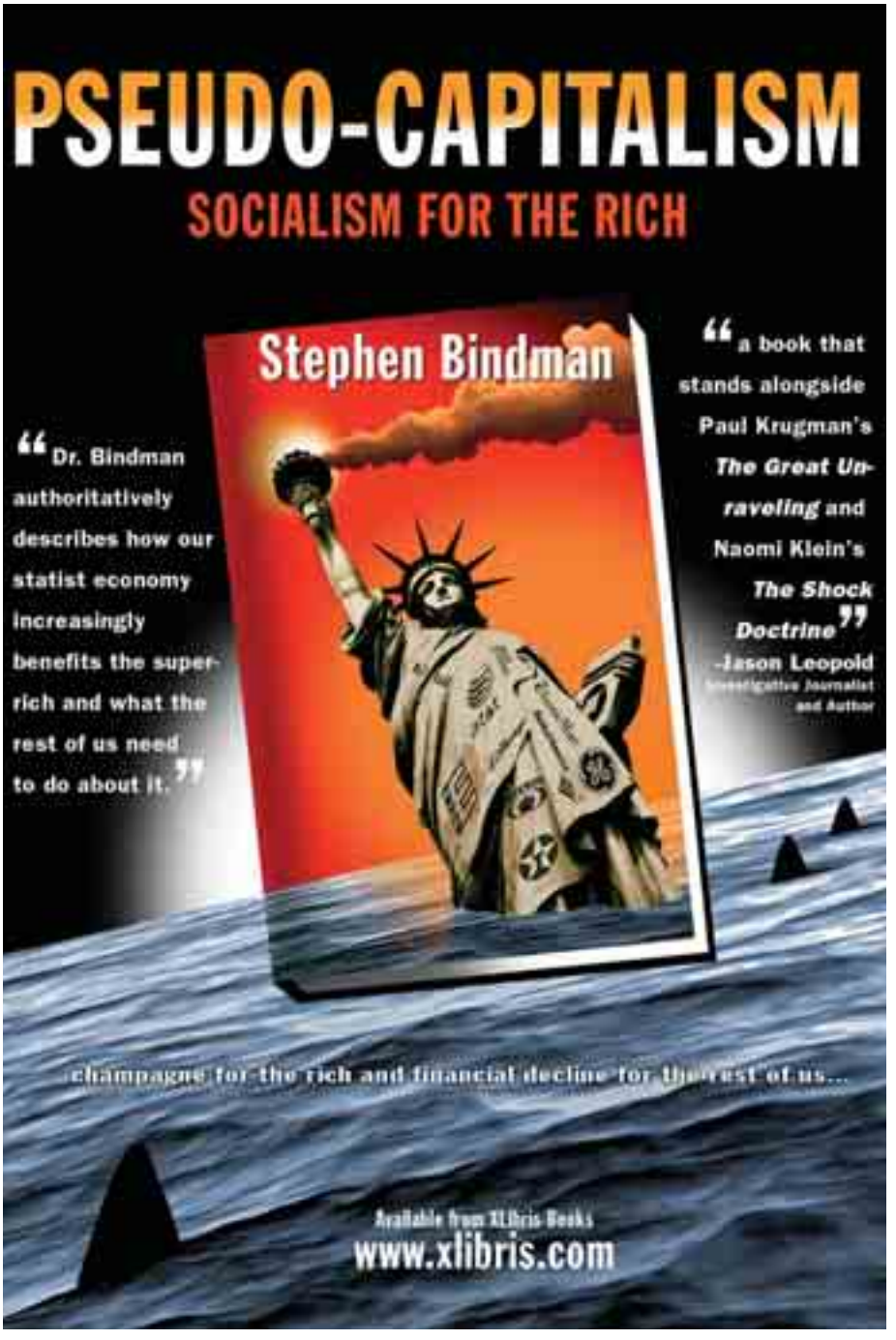
Amélia and her mother, and the latter doesn't know what to make of the threesome ("a creature with a lot of earrings and rings and two skinny young fellows who open my drawers and rummage in my pots and pans"). At Soraia's apartment, the three men fall into a comfortable camaraderie ("my father in a black wig/—Come in come on in hey/a song on the radio, a liqueur, Rui"). Lobo Antunes hints at the way the bizarre becomes familiar and ordinary, providing long glimpses of the cozy cabaret scene; but he never brings his full attention to bear on it, always cutting away to a side player's story.

One of these diversions is written from the perspective of a journalist, a random observer about the same age as Lobo Antunes. When the journalist tries to write a story about Soraia, who has been attacked by the heroin-dealing mulattoes, he is chided by his editor for cluttering up the story with too many details. The story, in fact, seems to be something close to the novel, a "tale of some Mulattoes and a drag queen all mixed in with a turkey in the oven, a slum of a house in Bico da Areia with a defunct gentian…." The Lobo Antunes–like journalist, meanwhile, is preoccupied by the realization that he is growing old ("sixty-two years old and with the beginnings of glaucoma"), a theme that is picked up in a chapter narrated from the perspective of another character of the same generation ("it's hard to be fifty-eight years old since September").

Weariness pervades the novel, so that even young Paulo seems preternaturally aged. A gloomy sense of the passage of time is repeatedly conveyed: in a faded photograph of the Couceiros' daughter ("features that were being eaten away by verdigris"), in Soraia's dusty glamor ("a pirouette of unimaginably worn velvet"), in Judite's bitter account of her long loneliness in Bico da Areia ("the mirror is finally dark, the bedroom is dark, the living room is dark"). Even the Tagus is weary where it flows past Bico da Areia, "tired of bumping into mountains, dams, castles, mills, desolate." This gloom is underscored by the victimhood of nearly all the characters. Soraia, it is discovered, owes her homosexuality to the fondling of an aunt who gave her baths when she was a boy, and Rui was driven from home by the hardheartedness of the aunt who raised him. Detours into the lives of Dona Amélia, the drag queen Marlene and Paulo's girlfriend Gabriela, among others, reveal child prostitution, murder and neglect. Perhaps emblematic of the general sense of hopelessness is Dona Aurorinha, a ragged old woman who lives upstairs from Soraia. She appears like a harbinger of failure, popping up every so often in Paulo's internal ramblings. Once a girl with a doting admirer, the recipient of "lilac messages," she is now a bony recluse, and even her groceries exude despair: "wilted vegetables, a small bottle of olive oil dripping green tears."

Though the novel is set in the late 1990s, it seems to hark back to a dimmer time. The simple, impoverished lives of Lobo Antunes's characters might have unfolded in the 1950s. The drag club, far from a glittering den of vice, seems a nostalgic throwback, and so plain are the furnishings of the Lisbon dwellings that the mention of a dwarf from Snow White that sits on the fridge in the Bico da Areia house strikes a jolting note of modernity. Only the heroin dealers belong to a truly contemporary world. The sense of mustiness, neglect and inconsequence are reinforced by an awareness of Portugal as a European backwater, trailing behind its prosperous neighbors. Whether any national malaise is reflected in the book is beside the point, but the notion of marginality does seem pertinent. Skilled and even brilliant as it is, the novel lacks the vitality (even the vigor of cruelty, usually a strength of Lobo Antunes's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■ Say no to US militarization of Latin America and the Carribean. On Sunday, November 9, the Granny Peace Brigade presents its third in a series of teach-ins focusing on the vast network of US overseas military bases. The Navy has re-established its Fourth Fleet (inactive since 1950) to patrol Latin American and Caribbean waters. The teach-in will address the implications of this outdated and provocative policy. Confirmed speakers: Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Ecuador's ambassador to the UN; Dr. Greg Grandin, NYU history professor and author of *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the U.S. and the Rise of New Imperialism*; and retired Army Col. Ann Wright, former diplomat and author of *Dissent: Voices of Conscience*. The moderator is Dr. Basil Wilson, political scientist, former provost of John Jay College of CUNY and featured columnist with the New York-based weekly *Carib News*. Church of the Ascension, 221 West 107th Street, east of Broadway. 2–5 PM; doors open at 1:30 for refreshments. Free. Wheelchair accessible, English/Spanish simultaneous translation and book signings. Information: www.grannypeacebrigade.org, (212) 865-7875, grannypeace@gmail.com.

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novels) to propel its substantial mass.

An abrupt conclusion, neat but unsatisfying, brings Paulo full circle, back to the club where Soraia clung to her passing fame until she grew thin and wasted, victim of the "illness that kills fags and street women." Her end is sad, but she loved the life she chose. Paulo, meanwhile, takes the path of least resistance, unorthodox as it is revealed to be. As the novel makes crushingly clear, the answer to the question *What Can I Do When Everything's on Fire?* is: succumb. ■

THE CINEMA GUILD

Zhao Tao as Su Na in *24 City*

Panoramas

by STUART KLAWANS

When the full effect hit, about twelve hours after I had seen his *24 City* at the New York Film Festival, it occurred to me that Jia Zhangke must now be the most important filmmaker in the world. Whether he's the most inventive, entertaining, moving, thoughtful or visually enthralling is another question. I think he might well be in the running in all those categories; but among other first-rate filmmakers, he clearly surpasses everyone in the scale of his subject matter, which is nothing less than the biggest economic, social and physical transformation taking place in the world today, in the most populous of all countries. When you see the earth from outer space, it's said, the only visible human artifact is the Great Wall of China. When the early twenty-first century is someday viewed from a comparable distance, the main artifacts to be seen may be the films of Jia Zhangke.

In *24 City*, he addresses his great subject by recording the decommissioning and demolition of a vast munitions plant in the city of Chengdu, in Sichuan province, after the property has been sold to a private developer. In place of Factory 420 will stand an upscale, glassy, mixed-use complex, with only a couple of the old brick structures retained to lend a touch of picturesque nostalgia. Jia's documentation of this development is the panoramic side of the film, with tracking shots that sidle through the echoing sheds, long-focus shots that fill the screen with a sea of workers' faces, crane shots that rise over acres of rubble where the foundations of the new complex are dug. The intimate side of the film, conceived as a series of interviews between subjects and an off-camera questioner, gives you the stories of middle-aged people who once worked in the factory and of young people who grew up in its dormitories and schools—and these segments, by and large, are fictional, scripted by Jia and Zhai Yongming and performed by professional actors.

You might think of these pseudo-documentary monologues as half a dozen self-contained melodramas—so ripe is each with heartbreak and disillusionment—if it weren't for the utter naturalism of Jia's mise-en-scène and the tact with which he places his camera, making sure not to crowd his subjects and then taking one more step

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back. The weary but enduring Hao Dali (played by Lu Liping) sits before the casement window in her bedroom, where potted plants are arranged prettily on the ledge, and recounts how decades ago the government shipped her to Chengdu to work in the factory—during the voyage, she explains, she was forced to leave behind her son. For Little Flower, by contrast, the abiding loss is her hope of marriage. Posed gracefully in the chair of a beauty parlor, with the bustle of a street passing outside the window, she explains the long sequence of accidents, misunderstandings and hardships that have led her to face middle age alone, even though everyone in the factory used to say she looked just like the star of *The Little Flower* and *The Last Emperor*, Joan Chen. No wonder—she's played by Joan Chen.

The youngest of the fictional characters, Su Na (played by Zhao Tao), has escaped factory life entirely, having set herself up as a personal shopper for rich women. She's modern, fashionable, confident about making money—but the bottom drops out of her voice when she remembers her sole experience of industry, on the occasion when she went looking for her mother amid countless, seemingly identical workers on a deafening factory floor. Su Na tells this tale while standing against the windows of an abandoned schoolroom. A vista of skyscrapers and highway ramps stretches into the distance behind her; and as her story pours out, twilight begins to gather.

But then, darkness is always falling in *24 City*. Monologue scenes keep fading to black and then resuming, as if the whole world had shut its eyes for a moment to concentrate; daytime sequences keep alternating with lonely nocturnal excursions through the city. This is the rhythm of things being made and unmade, of lives being gathered and scattered—and in the grand sweep of Jia's documentary, it's a fifty-year pulse: astounding, ironic, futile, cruel. Yet in the stories that make up Jia's fictions, going in sequence from the oldest character to the youngest, each moment is full in itself—often with sadness, certainly, but also with pride, resilience and (most of all, most astonishingly) love.

24 City won't open theatrically in the United States until early 2009. You should know about it now, though. This film is news, of the sort that festivals are meant to bring.

There is also a cinema that does not aspire to tell you the news—or, rather, one whose idea of an urgent flash would be: Sun Sets Again, Splatters Sky With a Thousand Colors!; Woman Has Sad Memory—and Looks Beautiful!; Tests Confirm:

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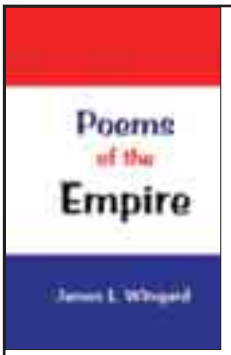

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Loud Music, Sweeping Choreography Go Together! These are the sort of excited bulletins that come in minute by minute in Wong Kar wai's *Ashes of Time Redux*, a New York Film Festival selection that is opening right now. Whether you think this picture, too, qualifies as important will depend on the value you place on a good swoon.

As the "Redux" in the title suggests, this 2008 feature brings back in new form an earlier, little-seen picture by Wong, *Ashes of Time* (1994), the first in his career to come unmoored from the known world. His earlier movies—*As Tears Go By*, *Days of Being Wild*, *Chungking Express*—had been less concerned with plot than with mood, character and suggestive details; but they nevertheless took place in a recognizable Hong Kong at an identifiable moment. With *Ashes of Time*, though, Wong floated away into the elemental, long-ago realm of Chinese martial arts stories. It was hard, at the time, to see what he'd gained. (I had a chance in 1994 to watch a cut of the movie and thought he'd gotten lost in a genre where he didn't belong.) But as Wong returned to fantasy worlds in later films—the science-fiction bullet train of *2046*, the oneiric Argentina of *Happy Together*—it became clear that he was looking for settings where emotions could drift more freely and be explained less. You might say he has found another of those settings in one of his own movies, having realized that he could recut *Ashes of Time*, alter its colors, layer on fresh music and come out with a new experience, one that exists outside history (in terms of its story) and also outside chronology (in terms of its place in Wong's filmography).

Sound confusing? Then wait till you get to the plot. Narrated in first-person voiceover, *Ashes of Time Redux* presents a year's worth of the memories of a legendary swordsman, Ouyang (the beautiful, late Leslie Cheung), who lives alone in a shack in the western desert and makes his living as an agent who hires assassins. As the seasons go by—each one's passing being marked by a reading from an almanac—the dashing but embittered Ouyang tries to get involved as little as possible with the people who visit him. These include a jilted, mad murderess princess who dresses up as her brother (Brigitte Lin); a homesick swordsman who is doomed to go blind (Tony Leung Chiu Wai); a poor peasant girl (Charlie Young) who doggedly tries to hire a killer, though she can pay only in eggs; and a shoeless, camel-riding swordsman (Jacky Cheung) with a surprisingly chivalrous nature. Most important among all these visitors is an old friend, the swordsman Huang (Tony Leung Ka Fai), who offers Ouyang a magic wine that will wipe away his memory. Who gave him the wine? Why was it given? Huang can't remember. He tried it, and it worked.

Eventually, you do find out what Huang once knew; but more important, you come to understand why Ouyang chooses to go on remembering. Despite all its narrative loops, and all its backstory intersections among the characters, *Ashes of Time Redux* delivers a couple of very simple but persuasive morals: it's good to go on bearing heartbreaking memories, so long as they're embodied in an image of Maggie Cheung posed at the window of a seaside cottage; and it's better to risk your life for a payment of one egg than to be a selfish wiseass.

I list these lessons (which are highly characteristic of Wong) so you'll know the emotions and sensations of *Ashes of Time Redux* are grounded in something real, even if it's not an era or locale. That said, Wong prefers not to linger over reasons. To explain his film and perhaps justify it, he offers only a quotation from Buddhist scripture and a few astrological predictions from the almanac. The rest is salmon sands (and saffron, and canary), skies that melt into bands of turquoise and violet, faces that shimmer with light reflected off water, lakes that shoot upward at the flash of a brandished sword. This is a fairy tale for melancholy adults, a magic show for the disillusioned. It happens in its own good time.

When Mike Leigh made his reputation in the 1980s, he was known as British cinema's fiercest and funniest chronicler of the Thatcher era. It wouldn't have occurred to his admirers back then that he, too, might someday make films about emotions wholly unprompted by political circumstance. But in *Happy-Go-Lucky* (another New York Film Festival selection now opening in theaters), Leigh has cooked up a pure conflict of temperaments. If the picture weren't clearly set in today's London, you'd think it was a seventeenth-century drama about the humors.

Gangly, long-faced Sally Hawkins stars as Poppy, a single, 30-year-old kindergarten teacher living in north London, whose perpetual expression of open-mouthed wonder and endless supply of silly jokes are perfectly suited to her classroom, though they might make her a little vulnerable anywhere else. She hardly seems to notice, though, being literally the bouncy type, whose favorite form of exercise is trampoline. Poppy is so chronically cheerful that she can't even stay upset when her bicycle is stolen. She just signs up for driving lessons—and so comes to share a tight space with Scott (Eddie Marsan), her clenched, hunched, glowering teacher, whose spluttered instructions leave a bitter residue on his goatee. She goofs behind the wheel and tries to perk him up. He rails against her careless attitude, her high-heeled boots (a suspiciously sensitive topic for him), all dark-skinned people (whom she likes just fine) and the omni-oppressive They. Most normal people would flee after the first lesson. Poppy sticks it out, week after week, as if to see whether she can jolly Scott into a better frame of mind. Though hardly a self-assertive person, she tacitly enters a contest of wills.

Moviegoers who have survived a live encounter with Mike Leigh may be tempted to think of this situation as an allegory of the rehearsal studio, in which Scott is a self-portrait of the director and Poppy is an actor who resists being broken. More generally, you could see *Happy-Go-Lucky* as a film about education: what changes in the process (the student's level of skill) and what does not (the essential character of student and teacher alike). This is, obviously, an apolitical view of the world—but that's not the big surprise. The greater novelty is that Leigh has come down for once on the side of sunniness and good will. If that makes *Happy-Go-Lucky* one of his minor films, it also makes it one of his airiest.

Lance Hammer's extraordinary debut feature, *Ballast*, is in large measure a landscape film, set in a hot place during a cold season: the Mississippi Delta in winter. From the opening shot, which trails after a young boy running through the fields, the widescreen images dwell on flat, lonely horizons, leafless trees, vast flocks of birds covering the sky, highways stretching ahead in the rain and long, long freight trains rolling past.

The main figures within this landscape are African-American: a man (Michael J. Smith Sr.) who owns a little property; a woman (Tarra Riggs) who scrubs toilets for a living; and her 12-year-old son (JimMyron Ross), who mostly plays video games and tries to hang with the older gang. Linked at first by mourning and mutual suspicion, and by the boy's clumsy attempts at criminality, these characters nevertheless manage to put together a little hope for themselves out of a roadside store and a collection of textbooks.

The performances, by a predominantly nonprofessional cast, are quietly impeccable. The narrative: oblique, unpredictable and moving. The film: highly recommended. ■

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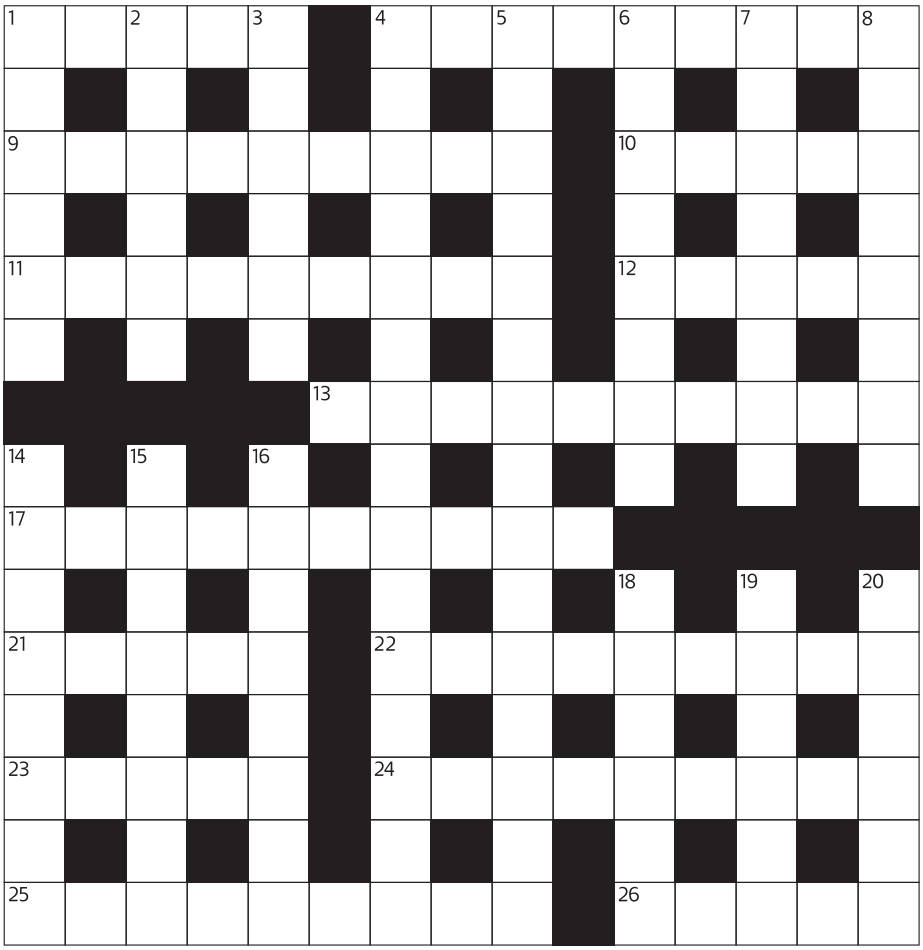

ACROSS

1 An extra actor has a point to being sort of pure, but hasn't anything to say, which is very, very good! (5)

4 A bit on the lemony side—you get to holler with nothing but a final hope! (9)

9 A famous battle, where you got a drink before the king and queen. (9)

10 Heads you get served these…(5)

11 …and possibly said to go very quietly with something on the side of your head, and totally vanish! (9)

12 An administrative officer is ever at sea, at some point. (5)

13 American novel. Maybe bucks at one point, and gets chicken, possibly! (10)

17 A fowl made ready for the grill. (You get to mend a number in your little stocking!) (10)

21 A pleasant smell, as some signs could say in Italy. (5)

22 There's a point to the worst sort of direction. (9)

23 You can't say there's no excuse for this! (5)

24 An irregular lien with sharp pain at the end for signing up. (9)

25 Gets terribly mixed up with possibly ten ways of looking at things. (9)

26 The hero's charger in a short way, when the river flows back. (5)

DOWN

1 Where bands play and newspapers are sold. (6)

2 Being somewhat la-di-da is one point to get nosy about. (6)

3 Unusual prices for directions to the cook. (6)

4 What happens when you're sworn to secrecy? There's no way of knowing! (3,5,3,4)

5 What some writers go around in? (8,7)

6 Given certain freedom, there's no getting up quietly, with a part to play. (2,6)

7 Where you don't want to be during a hurricane, or get a sock this way. (2,3,3)

8 A fancy name for a place to stay when broken-down hotels are located on the short railway line. (8)

14 Take little notice, but it's a way to get away around it, with a little fling! (8)

15 One who makes fun of things being equal to somewhat of a poet. (8)

16 To give rise to no coca is bad. (8)

18 The wrong shapes for certain aspects of the moon. (6)

19 Erect, I scrambled to repeat the lesson. (6)

20 A short way with the old way plays are put on. (6)

NEED MORE PUZZLES?

Each week another Frank W. Lewis "Crossword Classic" is brought out of the vault, at www.thenation.com.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3140

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	H		O		R		O		I		F		C	
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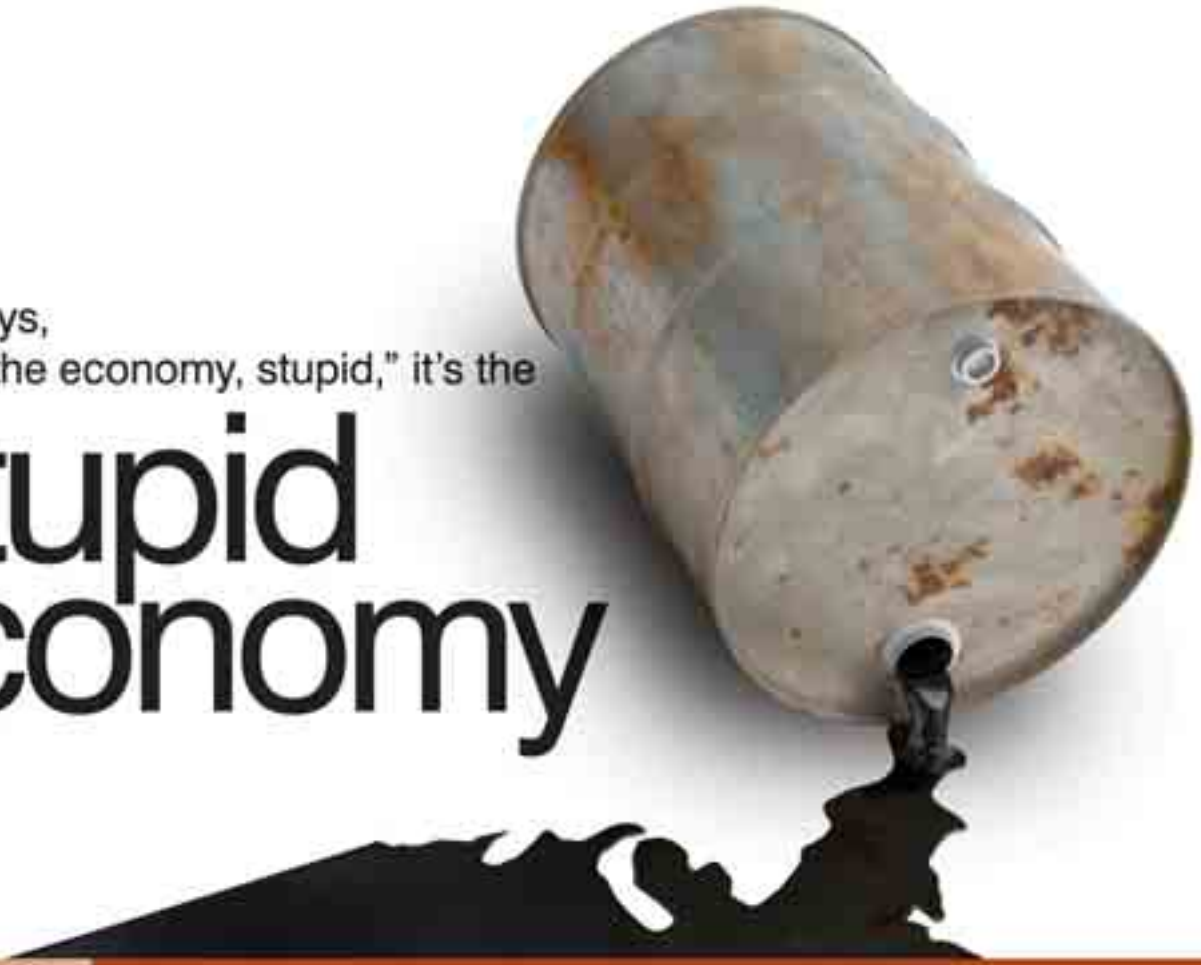
these days,
it's not "the economy, stupid," it's the

stupid economy



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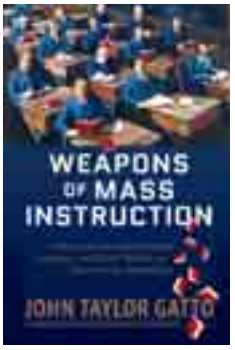
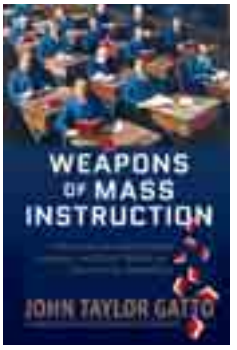
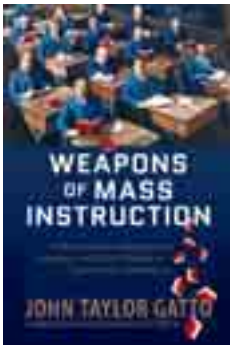
Everything You Know About School Is Wrong

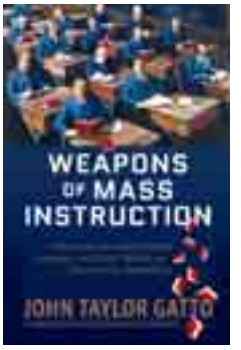
Says who? Former New York State Teacher of the Year, John Taylor Gatto, in his latest book, **Weapons of Mass Instruction.**
So What?! Who is John Taylor Gatto? Wasn't he only a public junior high school teacher in Manhattan for 30 years? Who listens to them? What *chutzpah*! Well, Gatto must have worried **School District Three** enough that it terminated his teaching license without notifying him in 1987 while he was on medical leave; he must have infuriated **Highland High School** in Hudson, New York enough to summon police to stop his lecture to seniors there in 2004. **Harvard's Kennedy School** Conference on April 3, 2008 credited him as the mysterious figure who added the biting metaphor **"Dumbing Us Down"** to global thinking about schools. In the past two years he was invited as keynote speaker to **South Korea, China, Australia, Pakistan, Egypt, Canada, Scotland, Holland, Hungary, England, Brazil, Columbia and Malaysia.** In 1991, his former students rented **Carnegie Hall** as a venue for his resignation speech which was printed in the **Wall Street Journal** on July 25th 1991. Why haven't you heard of him before now? He's spoken at **NASA Space Center, MIT, Smith, Apple Computers, The Western White House, The Senate, Smith and Sarah Lawrence, Cornell, Penn, Harvard, M.I.T., Stanford, Columbia,** gave the graduation address at Evergreen, and has been called, "Education's most original thinker," by Daniel Pink. **Howard Zinn** said his writing was "a remarkable achievement. I can't remember such a profound analysis of modern eduction." **Thomas Moore** called Gatto, "A Socrates of the educational world." **Chris Lasch** said, "Your ideas are splendid." **Robert Bly** counted him, "Among my heroes."

Why haven't you heard of him before? Is it because the school empire would prefer that you didn't?









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5. A physical regimen specifically aimed at personal grace, health, beauty, and self-discipline.
6. An emphasis on independent work.
7. Familiarity with master creations in music, dance, painting, design, architecture, literature, drama, etc.
8. Powers of observation and recording.
9. Developing and testing of judgment.
10. The ability to master your own natural aversions.
11. Accepting significant challenges: a horse to care for, a hundred mile bike trip to make, starting a business, etc.
12. Theories of access to anywhere.

It would be easy and inexpensive to build public schooling in such a way to deliver the same quality of value that Groton St. Paul's Episcopal High, Milton, Choate, Hotchkiss, or hill do. Look at the "twelve secrets", they don't cost anything extraordinary to achieve. But the Germanic logic of mass forced schooling has no intention of delivering such a product, for that would lead inevitably to a social and economic world turned upside down, one poisoned by the toxins of *overproduction* and *hyperdemocracy*, in whose deadly embrace neither corporate capitalism nor class-based social status can survive easily. Forced schooling has nothing to do with education. It is a workshop of habit and attitude training, it divides the common populace from its natural alliances, artificially extends childhood, cripples the imagination, as Spinoza and Fichte said it should, it addicts ordinary people to meaningless competitions, broadcasts self-alienation, weakens the family, misdirects the attention of the young from what really matters. As a nation, we can't afford this school vampire draining our national vitality any longer in these dangerous times.

John Taylor Gatto at Carnegie Hall

How to Order the Book: Send check to the author for $27.00 (postpaid) at John Taylor Gatto, 235 W. 76th St., New York, New York 10023 and you will receive a FREE $10.00 audio recording of one of the author's live lectures.
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